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DRAGON™

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

DRAGON™

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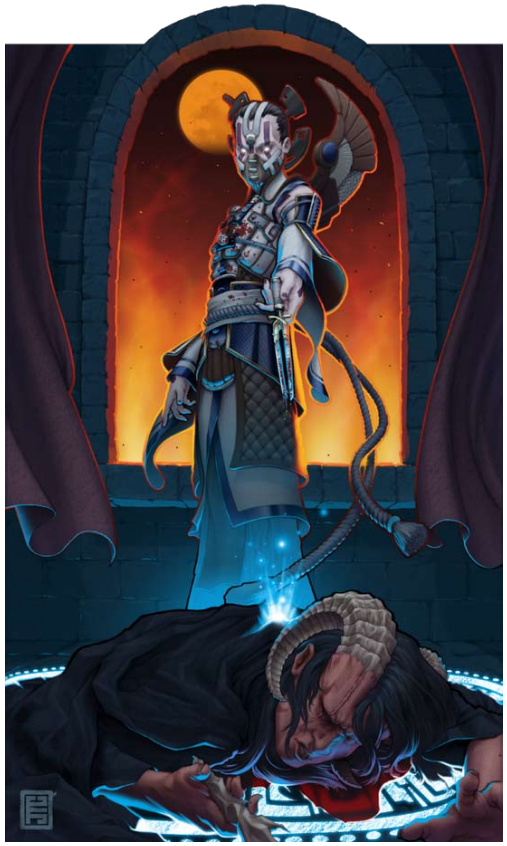

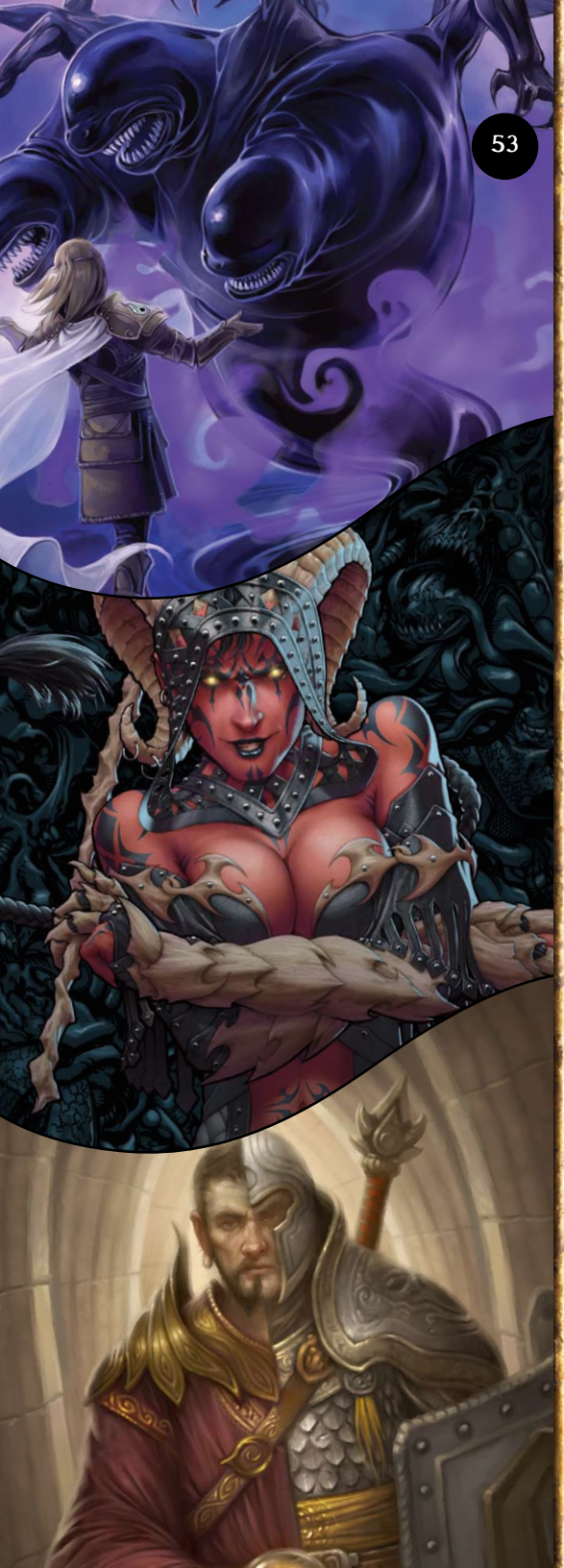

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March of the Monsters

For her latest *Confessions of a Full-Time Wizard column*, Shelly Mazzanoble interviewed several members of R&D. Her takeaway, in part, was a realization of just how long folks in R&D have been playing **Dungeons & Dragons**. In many cases, it's been decades. I share that longevity, extending back to 2nd grade. For me, few things are as satisfying s flipping through the pages of a 1st Edition *Monster Manual*. Of course, nostalgia reigns supreme. This is the edition I started playing, so the illustrations have always resonated with me.

A few years back, a few of us started a 0-edition campaign to break out the original rulebooks and see how the game played... with no small measure of difficulty and confusion. Despite setbacks, a few (including Steve Winter) have continued. While it's always fun to get together with friends and roll some dice, playing earlier editions of the game also brought back memories of their rules' issues.

Of course, I now also play 4th Edition campaigns. In one session, we faced a roper, a creature going back to the game's earliest days. Back in 1st Edition, here's how the roper played out:

The roper has six strands of strong, sticky rope-like excretion which it can shoot from 2"-5". A hit causes weakness (50% from strength in 1-3 melee rounds), and the roper then draws its prey into its toothy maw where it is quickly devoured. The chance for breaking a strand is the same for opening a door, but every round the roper will drag the victim 10' closer. They are unaffected by lightning, take half damage at most from cold, but are very susceptible to fire (-4 on saving throw).

Good lord. Strength damage over time? *Then* it drags its prey? And you can break a strand, but it still drags you closer? What exactly is happening here, and when?

In 3rd Edition, the roper's strands were codified as follows:

Weakness (Ex): A roper's strands can sap an opponent's strength. Anyone grabbed by a strand must succeed on a DC 18 Fortitude save or take 2d8 points of Strength damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Again, once hit, players were forced to recalculate Strength scores and all dice modifiers dependent on Strength—on the fly. In my opinion, that's the true damage caused by a 3rd Edition roper: frustration around the table. And heaven help you if, after recalculating your Strength, the roper hits you with a *second* strand. The last thing any DM wants is for the table to grind to a halt for any reason. Left with this, it may have been easier to not use ropers in an encounter.

So, how did the roper play in our recent 4th Edition session? It beat the stuffing out of our party. It grabbed us, weakened us, drew us closer and bit us. It did everything a roper was always designed to do, and it did so without grinding down the game. I loved it.

My sincere belief is that 4th Edition allows monsters to be played more easily than ever before—without sacrificing their core concepts. I've experienced this in multiple 4th Edition games, as "classic" monsters hit the table and played true to their concept: ropers, stirges, bulletes. Even, or perhaps especially, dragons. I've never had the privilege of facing the tactical nightmare that is the beholder, but I can't help but believe they too play better than ever at the table.

I think we always knew these classic monsters would remain in the game, appearing in 4th Edition's *Monster Manuals*. To no small extent, they had to remain. It's just especially satisfying to see them back at the table as well. So what are your favorite monsters from past editions that have been improved in 4th Edition? What about monsters that you think have suffered in their latest incarnation? And what monsters would you like to see updated that haven't been as of yet? Send us your feedback at dndinsider@wizards.com.

Art of the Kill

By Robert J. Schwalb

illustrations by Jason A. Engle, John Tyler Christopher

Oblivious to the fact he was dead, the noble sucked grapes from the stem and rested his feet on the back of a slave. His killer, Rook, stood unseen in shadows cast by an overhanging balcony. The bolt that would soon nest in the noble's neck sat in the hand crossbow held in Rook's firm grip, its black shaft green with venom.

Rook didn't move, and his target remained blissfully unaware that in a moment Rook would quench his life's flame with all the concern of a lamplighter snuffing a streetlight at dawn. The noble laughed at a jest. The painted courtesans tittered. Rook's finger kissed the trigger.

The crossbow made only the faintest sound as it released the bolt. A dark streak, a surprised grunt, a clattering goblet, a sharp intake of breath, and screams. It was over. Rook vanished into a black pall, slipping through his drow-born supernatural gloom to make good in his escape. Another offering to the Raven Queen—another wretch silenced and sped to whatever lay beyond.

Free from the noble's manor, Rook slipped between two row houses. The streets came alive with shouts and the whistle blows of the watch. Rook ran down a crooked avenue. He remembered his companions, good and noble souls all, awaited him at the Salty Mug. Their employer was to meet with them at dawn to discuss their next expedition. It wouldn't do for his comrades to know about his nocturnal adventures. They wouldn't understand the price exacted by his cold mistress and the penance he must still pay for betraying her so long ago.

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For four editions of the Dungeons & Dragons® game, assassins lurked in one form or another, sometimes as heroes of sinister means or as heartless murderers, slaying for fortune. They have also been presented as dread villains and relentless antagonists who wait for the moment to strike and write the final chapter in the heroes' lives. Killing is part of an adventuring career for most, but others shape this necessary skill into art and even into destiny.

This article offers a look into the bloody trade, and it presents new techniques for those who desire to employ tactics that could one day place them among the world's most infamous killers. With the new rules and background material presented here, just about any character can develop talents to become deadlier.

The D&D® game has plenty of such killers already. The shadow assassin (*Player's Handbook*® page 128), cloaked sniper (*Martial Power*™ page 88), death dealer (*Martial Power* page 90), and zealous assassin (*Player's Handbook 2* page 47) paragon paths combine with the Perfect Assassin epic destiny (*Martial Power* page 156) to offer ways to theme your character as a lethal slayer. This article doesn't undermine existing and future options. Instead it takes expert killing out of the rogue's domain and brings it into the wider realm of PC options by offering new avenues to develop deadly and subtle talents to dispatch enemies.

Killing for a Living

Death is a grim trade for those not above using treachery and subterfuge to eliminate their prey. A dubious art to be sure, murder is efficacious in silencing the enemy, and thus it finds its masters in assassins, thieves, enforcers, and, of course, adventurers. Those who study the art are among the greatest killers in the world, second only to the shadowy true assassins.

Secret Languages

If you're a DM, Thieves' Cant, Druidic, Drow Sign Language, and other secret languages might exist in your game world. Some organizations develop such secret languages to facilitate the safe exchange of information, whether it serves to warn, to pass along a potential job, or to reveal an important detail about a place, person, or threat. The lexicon varies with the organization. Some secret languages are full-fledged tongues, while others are coded with double-talk, jargon, or a jumbling of other languages.

Secret languages sometimes use secret signs for written and visual communication. Most signs are innocuous, easily overlooked, and capable of blending into their environment. A traveler versed in Beggar's Cant might leave an arrangement of stones in front of a farmstead's fence to describe the farmer, either warning off other travelers or to name the farmer a friend, with a guarantee of a warm meal and bed to those in need.

If you use secret languages, player characters can gain them only from a background benefit or from the Linguist feat or any other feat that grants fluency in a language. The characters might also learn such a language as a form of reward in an ongoing campaign.

For all its sinister overtones, the art of murder is more than a method for quick kills. The noble murderess with poison hidden in her ring might dabble in its forms as could the callous street thug armed with a club and terrible temper. Aristocratic spies, religious zealots, dark wizards, hooded executioners, and others can all find use in these murderous methods. Many who practice this art are soulless villains who kill guilty and innocent alike provided the pay is high enough. But killers can enter the trade for many reasons—to gain justice denied them, for self-preservation, or to hone talents to fight back against other dangers. Establishing the reasons for your trade can help shape how your character functions in the world and in your group, provide justifications for your alignment choices, and gives you objectives and quests as the campaign unfolds.

Murderous Backgrounds

The easiest way to build your character's history and lay the groundwork for motivations and behavior in the game is to select an appropriate background. The *Player's Handbook 2*, *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide*, and several *Dragon*® articles offer a wide range of background options, many of which are suitable for characters who study the slayer's art. The following backgrounds—a mix of occupations and events—help justify your place in just about any adventuring group.

When choosing your background, you can add one of the associated skills to your list of class skills, gain a +2 bonus to checks involving one of the associated skills, or gain fluency in the suggested language.

Bounty Hunter

You hunted down fugitives from justice, tracking them down and bringing them in for the rewards on their heads. What drew you to this trade? Did it matter to you if the fugitive was guilty or innocent? Did anyone ever escape your clutches? Who was your most notorious captive?

Associated Skills: Perception, Stealth

Suggested Language: Any one other than Abyssal or Supernal.

Executioner

You were the hand of justice—an executioner charged with dispatching the guilty. Did you enjoy this work or did it sicken you? What were your preferred methods? Pulling a lever, swinging an axe, or another way? Did you execute any famous personages?

Associated Skills: Bluff, Intimidate

Foe Killer

You fought and killed your people's enemies. What sorts of creatures do you define as enemies of your people? Do you target members of a humanoid race, such as goblins? Or do you hunt monstrous threats such as aberrant horrors or undead? How does your long experience fighting these creatures shape your personality? How do you react when you encounter your favored enemy?

Associated Skills: Insight, Perception, or the knowledge skill that best relates to your enemy

Suggested Language: The language commonly spoken by your enemy.

Guerrilla

You fought for an oppressed people, working in the shadows to free them from their oppressors. Were your people conquered? By whom? What sorts of tactics did you employ? Did you succeed in freeing your people or are they still enslaved?

Associated Skills: Perception, Stealth

Hired Killer

You killed people for a living. Were there jobs you wouldn't take? What led you to this line of work? How did it affect you? What made you change your life? Did you ever kill an innocent? How do you deal with the memories from this time in your life and how do they shape your decisions now? What sorts of techniques did you use? Were you a sniper or did you close on your target?

Associated Skills: Athletics, Stealth

Suggested Language: Secret Language

Hunter

You are a skilled hunter. Did you hunt animals or monsters? Did you hunt to support a family or were you a loner? What sorts of weapons did you use? What brought you out from the wilderness? How do you use your hunting techniques as an adventurer?

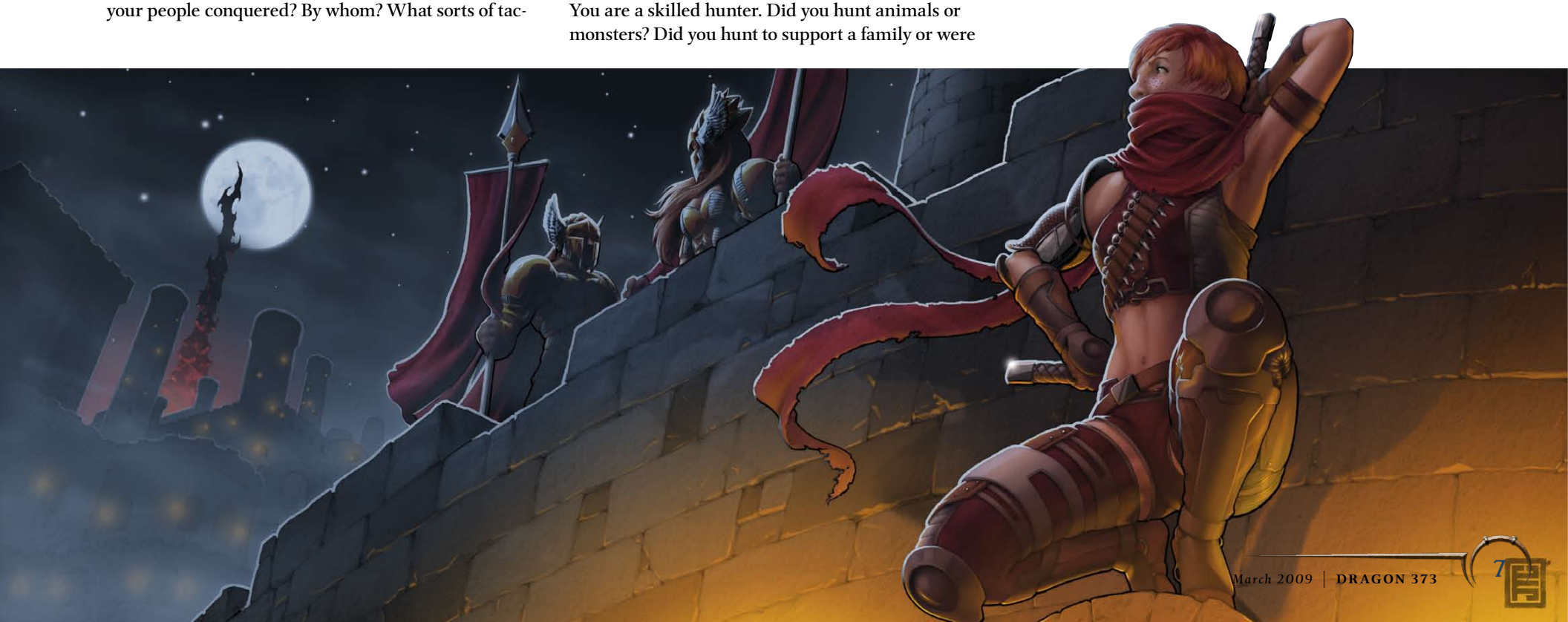
Associated Skills: Nature, Perception, Stealth

Infiltrator

You infiltrated enemy ranks, working from within to ferret out secrets or disrupt plans. Who did you work for? Did you operate within a noble's court, for an army, or for a secretive organization? Was it an individual, organization, or nation? What identities did you assume? Were you ever discovered? If so, how did you escape?

Associated Skills: Bluff, Stealth

Suggested Language: Any one other than Abyssal or Supernal.



Mystic Slayer

You were a trained killer who focused on eliminating magical or magic-using targets. For whom did you work? How did you train for this occupation? What lessons did you learn from your experiences? How does your past affect your relationship with other player characters who use magic?

Associated Skills: Arcana, Stealth

Suggested Language: Draconic

Poison Master

You were a master of poisons. How did you learn this trade? What sorts of enemies did you use poison against? Why are poisons your preferred tools? Did you use these concoctions yourself or did you sell them? If you sold them, what made you stop?

Associated Skills: Nature, Thievery

Punisher

You were wronged at a point in the past and you worked for revenge, perhaps turning to a life of punishing similar wrongdoers. Who wronged you? Did they harm you directly or hurt someone you loved? Did you achieve the revenge you sought? When you got it, what did you do next? If you're still working toward revenge, how do you plan to get it?

Associated Skills: Intimidate, Streetwise

Revolutionary

You fomented rebellion in your homeland. What sort of government did you fight? What sorts of crimes and injustices did it commit? Were you successful? What happened to the people you helped? Or did you fail? Are the people worse off? What sorts of tactics did you use?

Associated Skills: History, Streetwise

Thief

You were a thief. Were you a cutpurse, a burglar, a grifter, or something else? Were you driven to thievery by necessity? Were you part of a guild or syndicate, or harassed by one as an independent operator? Are you still a member or still hunted? If so, where is the guild based? If not, why did you leave—or why did the guild let you be? Was the parting amicable or are there people out there looking to settle a score with you?

Associated Skills: Stealth, Thievery

Suggested Language: Secret Language (see the sidebar on page 6)

Thug

You were a thug, such as an enforcer, a tough, or a bodyguard. Did you work for anyone? If so, who? What sorts of missions did you undertake? Were you feared in your community? Or did you stand up for those who were too weak to protect themselves? Why did you leave? Did you leave behind any enemies?

Associated Skills: Athletics, Intimidation

Suggested Language: Secret Language (see the sidebar on page 6)

Zealous Slayer

You had a revelation from the gods, or you think you did, and saw it as your life's work to destroy the enemies of your faith. Who or what appeared to you? Was it a person or did the idea come to you in a dream? Who do you define as an enemy of your faith? How does your vision fit with other representatives of your faith? Are you a rogue element or an accepted member of a religious organization?

Associated Skills: Endurance, Religion

Killer Alignment

Under most definitions, a person who kills for money is evil. Should not the practitioners of the slayer's art be evil? Throughout the game's long history, assassins have been described as such. In the AD&D® *Player's Handbook* and in 2nd Edition's *Scarlet Brotherhood,* only evil characters could become assassins. In both versions of 3rd Edition, only evil characters could advance into the assassin prestige class. With such a legacy, it might be tempting to continue as before and restrict the options presented in this article to the rare groups of evil adventurers, but doing so closes the door on interesting and exciting character concepts.

Actual murder for profit can't be conceived as anything but evil, though not all who work in the blood trade murder for profit. In fact, the first assassins were militants who specialized in murder as a political tool to defeat figures responsible for persecution or tyranny. Killers chose their targets carefully, relied on blades to ensure a swift and public death, and planned their strikes to avoid unnecessary casualties and protect innocents from harm during the attack. Other similar killers worked for religious purposes, refusing even to spill blood in their work.

From a certain point of view, a killer might save lives, since the murder of a highly placed figure enables political, social, or ideological change without the necessity of war. A pragmatist might go so far as to say such a murder is a blessing, since the ends justifies the means. Murder is murder, and from the act comes the ethical quandary as to whether a killer, even one who serves a good cause, can be anything but evil.

Within the context of the Dungeons & Dragons game, alignments provide the basic architecture for character morality in the game, or the framework around which a player might construct a character's ethical views and what a character is willing to do and tolerate. Alignments, though, are not roleplaying

straightjackets. They don't restrict behavior and don't dictate action, but rather help define your character's values.

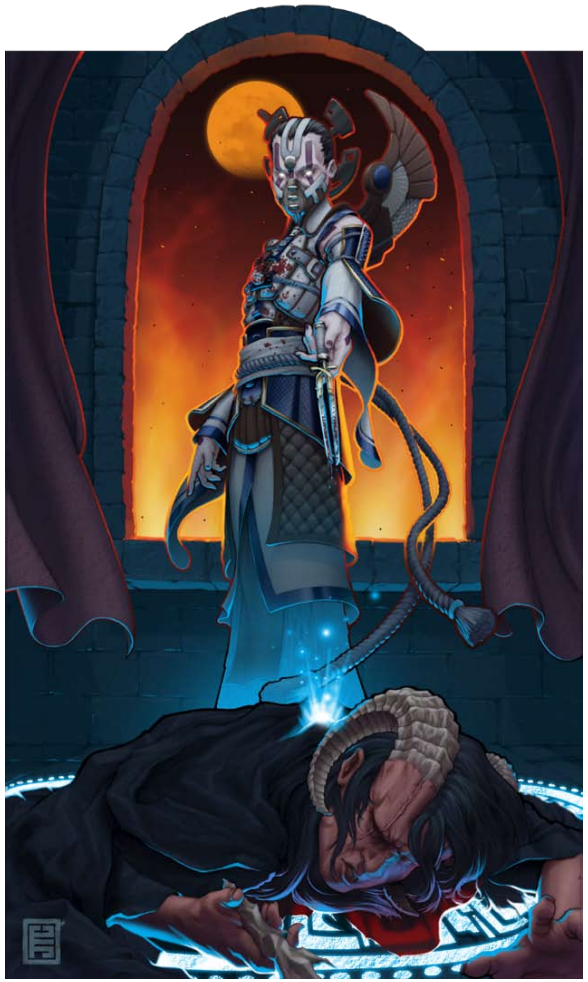
A good-aligned character values protecting the weak and opposing anyone who would exploit or harm those who cannot protect themselves. Murder might be an acceptable method for combating those forces who would conquer and kill, and it might be a vital tool in fighting tyranny. Certainly, those who slay villains and monsters are often good and are also typical D&D heroes.

The lawful good alignment can also permit slayers, though of a specific kind. These characters embrace order as the ultimate means for combating evil. A slayer who operates in the interest of maintaining order and good by targeting those who would dismantle justice and subvert or corrupt the good is not at all in odds within the context of what a lawful good character might do.

Unaligned killers also work. Characters who use assassination techniques to attain a greater objective independent of moral concerns might be effective assassins. It is also not a stretch to think assassins are among the Raven Queen's followers. These killers destroy those who would thwart or avoid death. Such characters can be heroes of a sort, as well, slaying undead who prey on the living and outlive their allotted time in the world.

Evil and chaotic evil slayers are villains. They kill for money, making no distinction between innocent or guilty and snuffing out the lives of anyone they were hired to kill. Chaotic evil slayers might murder to wreak havoc or to oppose the good by silencing its greatest voices. Such characters might also work to dismantle civilization, striking to topple just governments to create unrest, fear, and turmoil.

So even though the techniques a killer uses might be similar, the agendas they serve might be every bit as principled and virtuous as those held by noble paladins and idealist clerics. Where most people have trouble when it comes to the practiced killer is with the tactics such a character uses. Such slayers rarely accept a fight on fair terms. Instead they use every tactic at their disposal to eliminate a foe quickly. Although such tactics do little to endear the assassin to those who prefer direct and "honorable" confrontation, when results matter more than methods, a slayer can be a welcome addition to even the most virtuous of groups.



Feats

Although paragon paths in the *Player's Handbook*, *Player's Handbook 2*, and *Martial Power* grant opportunities to become a variety of assassins, through careful feat selection, any character can hone the art of killing. The following feats capture and expand options for such slayers.

Heroic Tier Feats

Any feat in the following section is available to a character of any level who meets the prerequisites.

Alchemical Opportunist

Benefit: If you have an alchemical item in hand when an enemy provokes an opportunity attack from you, you can use the alchemical item instead of making a melee basic attack.

Bloodied Fleetness

Benefit: While bloodied, you gain a +1 bonus to speed.

Connected

Prerequisite: Trained in Streetwise

Benefit: You can roll any Streetwise check twice, taking the highest result.

Fey Escape

Prerequisite: Eladrin

Benefit: You can use your *fey step* racial power as an immediate reaction when grabbed, immobilized, or restrained.

True Assassins

Those who study the art of murder invariably hear rumors about other killers who some regard as true assassins. No one knows with certainty if these people or creatures exist, so they relegate them to legend and myth. Where the tales agree, they paint these mysterious figures as creatures of the night, having no need for the tricks and tools used by their lesser ilk. Some say they can step through walls, blend into the stuff of shadows, alter their appearance at will, and command the gloaming to do their bidding. If these true assassins exist, they have left behind no witnesses—only questions and chilling fear.

Poison Inured

Prerequisite: Con 13

Benefit: You gain a feat bonus equal to your Constitution modifier to saving throws against poison effects.

Slow Fall

Prerequisite: Trained in Acrobatics

Benefit: When you fall, you reduce the falling damage you take by your Acrobatics check result instead of one-half your check result.

Paragon Tier Feats

Any feat in the following section is available to any character of 11th level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

FEATS

Heroic Tier Feats	Prerequisites	Benefit
Alchemical Opportunist	—	Use alchemical item with opportunity attack
Bloodied Retreat	—	+1 speed while bloodied
Connected	Trained in Streetwise	Roll Streetwise checks twice
Feywild Escape	Eladrin	*Fey step* when grabbed, immobilized, or restrained
Poison Inured	Con 13	Add Con modifier to saving throws against poison
Slow Fall	Trained in Acrobatics	Reduce falling damage by Acrobatics check result

Paragon Tier Feats	Prerequisites	Benefit
Eyedark Strike	11th level, drow	Expend *cloud of darkness* to blind damaged enemy
Fey Death	11th level, eladrin	Kill enemy to teleport 3
Persistent Poison	11th level	Enemies take -2 saving throws to end your poison effects
Prime Punisher	11th level, Prime Shot	Use Prime Shot with melee attacks
Unexpected Escape	11th level	+4 to escape, shift 2 with an escape

Epic Tier Feats	Prerequisites	Benefit
Critical Ambush	21st level, rogue	Deal sneak attack damage with a critical hit
Poison's Partner	21st level	Poison effects grant combat advantage to you
Untraceable	21st level, trained in Stealth	+5 Stealth while unseen, immune to Scrying rituals

Eyedark Strike

Prerequisites: 11th level, drow

Benefit: When you deal damage to a target, you can expend your *cloud of darkness* racial power as a free action to blind the target until the end of your next turn.

Fey Death

Prerequisites: 11th level, eladrin

Benefit: When you reduce an enemy to 0 hit points, you can use your *fey step* racial power as an free action.

Persistent Poison

Prerequisite: 11th level

Benefit: Your targets take a -2 penalty to saving throws made to end your poison effects.

Prime Punisher

Prerequisites: 11th level, Prime Shot class feature

Benefit: If no other ally is adjacent to an enemy you are adjacent to, for melee attacks against that enemy, you receive any bonuses you gain while using your Prime Shot class feature.

Unexpected Escape

Prerequisite: 11th level

Benefit: You gain a +4 bonus to Acrobatics or Athletics checks made to escape a grab and any other effect that allows you to escape. Whenever you successfully escape, you can shift 2 squares.

Epic Tier Feats

Any feat in the following section is available to any character of 21st level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Critical Ambush

Prerequisites: 21st level, rogue, Sneak Attack class feature

Benefit: If you score a critical hit with a weapon that you can Sneak Attack with, you can apply your Sneak Attack damage if you have it available.

Poison's Partner

Prerequisite: 21st level

Benefit: An enemy suffering from a poison effect grants combat advantage to you.

Untraceable

Prerequisites: 21st level, trained in Stealth

Benefit: You gain a +5 bonus to Stealth checks against creatures that cannot see you, such as while you are invisible or in a totally obscured space, or the creature is blind. You don't receive this bonus against creatures that do not rely on sight to detect enemies. Additionally, Scrying rituals cannot detect you unless you want them to.

Guild Feats

Members of business organizations form close bonds that make them work better as a team. It's no different for those who practice darker forms of business, such as thievery or assassination. Guild feats represent the sort of training that makes a unit of guild members work together with solid and deadly efficiency. These feats are designed to promote teamwork by granting a basic benefit that improves while other allies with the same feat are nearby.

However, just using these feats as expanding bonuses misses the roleplaying opportunity they present. An adventuring party that takes these feats might be part of an organization they have created, or part of a larger guild. They might carry symbols in some form, which identify them as guild members. A secret language might be theirs for communicating simple information on and off the battlefield. When you take these feats, look beyond their mechanical benefits and build your party into a cohesive group.

Furtive Signals [Guild]

Benefit: You gain a +2 feat bonus to Bluff checks. You can communicate simple information silently with any ally who has this feat and has line of sight to your position. You can use Bluff to gain combat advantage or create a diversion to hide for one ally who has this feat and is within 5 squares of you, instead of for yourself. Your allies who have this feat can do the same for you.

Grasping Magpies [Guild]

Benefit: You gain a +2 feat bonus to Thievery checks. Whenever an ally with this feat successfully aids you on your Thievery check, you gain a +4 bonus instead of the normal +2 bonus.

Guild Feats	Prerequisites	Benefit
Furtive Signals	—	+2 Bluff, share Bluff results, communicate silently
Grasping Magpie	—	+2 Thievery, +4 with ally's aid
Roof Runners	—	+1 Acrobatics, +4 with ally's aid, improved check time
Silent Shadows	—	+2 Stealth, reroll Stealth checks with bonus from allies
Street Eyes	—	+2 Streetwise, +4 with ally's aid, improved check time
Wall Crawlers	—	+2 Athletics, +4 with ally's aid, improved check time

Roof Runners [Guild]

Benefit: You gain a +2 feat bonus to Acrobatics checks. Whenever an ally with this feat successfully aids you on your Acrobatics check, you gain a +4 bonus instead of the normal +2 bonus. An ally with this feat can aid you by taking the same type of action you are taking to use Acrobatics.

Silent Shadows [Guild]

Benefit: You gain a +2 feat bonus to Stealth checks. Whenever you roll a result you dislike on a Stealth check and you are within 5 squares of an ally that also has this feat, you can reroll the Stealth check with a +1 bonus for each such ally, to a maximum of +5. You can then use the best result.

Weapon Mastery Feats

A slayer eschews larger weapons for smaller, concealable ones that allow a warrior to strike when and where least expected. Weapon mastery feats are multiclass feats based around a single weapon. They reflect a higher degree of training and expertise, allowing trained killers to maximize the benefit of a preferred weapon. Weapon mastery feats require focused training, so they act as multiclass feats as described under Multiclass Feats here.

Previous Weapon Mastery Feats

Weapon Mastery feats have appeared before in "We Who Are About to Die . . ." (*Dragon* 368, page 56) and "Playing Shadar-Kai" (*Dragon* 372, page 5). Those articles rightly described the initial training feats for weapon mastery as multiclass feats. They failed to make clear that those multiclass feats—Bola Training, Net Training, Spiked Chain Training, and Whip Training—are class-specific multiclass feats.

Street Eyes [Guild]

Benefit: You gain a +2 feat bonus to Streetwise checks. Whenever an ally with this feat successfully aids you on your Streetwise check, you gain a +4 bonus instead of the normal +2 bonus. An ally can instead aid you to reduce the time it takes you to find information by half.

Wall Crawlers [Guild]

Benefit: You gain a +2 feat bonus to Athletics checks. Whenever an ally with this feat successfully aids you on your Athletics check, you gain a +4 bonus instead of the normal +2 bonus. An ally with this feat can aid you by taking the same type of action you are taking to use Athletics.

Multiclass Feats

For further emphasis on the art of death, you might invest multiclass feats into intensive fighting styles. Although not a true class, these feats provide you with advanced tactics and capabilities, so they act as multiclass feats, and they expand your capabilities with power swap feats that require the initial multiclass feat. Each initial multiclass feat—such as Bravo or Blowgun Training—is considered a class-specific feat, with the named fighting style or weapon acting as the specific class. As with other class-specific multiclass feats, once you take one, you can't take one for a different class (or weapon, or style) unless another rule allows you to do so.

Blowgun Training [Multiclass Blowgun]

Prerequisites: Dex 13

Benefit: You gain proficiency with the blowgun. You can reload a blowgun as a free action, you increase a blowgun's range to 10/20, and you treat a blowgun as a high critical weapon. If you are a rogue, you can use the blowgun with the Sneak Attack class feature and any rogue ranged attack power that can be used with a crossbow or sling.

Blowgun Novice

Prerequisites: 4th level, Blowgun Training

Benefit: You can swap one 3rd-level or higher encounter attack power you know for the *stinging shot* attack power.

Stinging Shot — Feat Power

The needle lodges in a sensitive area, jolting your prey with pain.

Encounter ✦ Weapon
Standard Action **Ranged** weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a blowgun.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn.
11th Level: Increase the damage to 3[W].
21st Level: Increase the damage to 4[W].
Special: If you miss with this attack and you are hidden from your target, you remain hidden.

Blowgun Expert

Prerequisites: 8th level, Blowgun Training

Benefit: You can swap one 6th-level or higher utility power you know for the *uncanny aim* utility power.

Uncanny Aim — Feat Power

You breathe precisely, taking in your target and carefully lining up the needle's trajectory.

Encounter
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must be wielding a blowgun.
Effect: Your next attack made with a blowgun and before the end of your next turn gains a +2 bonus to the attack roll and deals +1[W] damage.

Blowgun Specialist

Prerequisites: 10th level, Blowgun Training

Benefit: You can swap one 9th-level or higher daily attack power you know for the *crippling needle* attack power.

Crippling Needle — Feat Power

Your needle lodges in a key pressure point, causing your target to stiffen and momentarily fail to act.

Daily ✦ Weapon
Standard Action **Ranged** weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a blowgun.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity modifier damage, and the target is stunned until the end of your next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target is dazed (save ends).
At 15th level, increase to 3[W] damage.
At 25th level, increase to 5[W] damage.
Miss: Half damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Bravo [Multiclass Bravo]

You are a grim and relentless killer—a bloodthirsty combatant who pursues your enemies to the bitter end.

Benefit: You gain training in the Intimidate skill.

Once per encounter, as a minor action, you can designate one creature you can see as your prey, gaining +2 to attack rolls and damage rolls against that creature until the end of your next turn. The creature remains your prey until it drops to 0 hit points, until you end the effect as a free action, or until the end of the encounter—whichever comes first.

Multiclass Feats	Prerequisites	Benefit
Blowgun Training	Dex 13, any martial class	Improved proficiency with a blowgun
Blowgun Novice	4th level, Blowgun Training	Swap encounter attack power for *stinging shot*
Blowgun Expert	8th level, Blowgun Training	Swap utility power for *uncanny aim*
Blowgun Specialist	10th level, Blowgun Training	Swap daily attack power for *crippling needle*
Bravo	—	Training in Intimidate, 1/encounter, designate a creature as prey
Bravo Novice	4th level, Bravo	Swap encounter attack power for *death's messenger*
Bravo Expert	8th level, Bravo	Swap utility power for *brutal instinct*
Bravo Specialist	10th level, Bravo	Swap daily attack power for *bravo's finish*
Cutthroat	Trained in Bluff	Training in Stealth, create a diversion to hide as a minor action
Cutthroat Novice	4th level, Cutthroat	Swap encounter power for *sudden retaliation*
Cutthroat Expert	8th level, Cutthroat	Swap utility power for *cutthroat's scrutiny*
Cutthroat Specialist	10th level, Cutthroat	Swap daily attack power for *quick kill*
Garrote Training	Str 13, Dex 13	Improved proficiency with a garrote
Garrote Novice	4th level, Garrote Training	Swap encounter attack power for *choking grab*
Garrote Expert	8th level, Garrote Training	Swap utility power for *body shield*
Garrote Specialist	10th level, Garrote Training	Swap daily attack power for *strangler's hold*
Poisoner	Trained in Dungeoneering or Nature	Training in Thievery, ignore some resist poison and immune poison
Poisoner Novice	4th level, Poisoner	Swap encounter attack power for *improvised poison*
Poisoner Expert	8th level, Poison Training	Swap utility power for *potent poison*
Poisoner Specialist	10th level, Poisoner	Swap daily attack power for *progressive toxin*

Bravo Novice

Prerequisites: 4th level, Bravo

Benefit: You can swap one 3rd-level or higher encounter attack power you know for the *death's messenger* attack power.

Death's Messenger — Feat Power

You prey has an appointment with death, and your strike lets it know that fact.

Encounter ✦ Rattling
Standard Action
Special: In addition to the keyword above, this power is considered to have the same keywords and range as the at-will power you use with it.
Target: One creature that is your prey
Effect: Use a melee or ranged at-will attack power on the target. If you hit, you deal +1[W] damage, or +1 die of damage if it is a nonweapon attack.
11th Level: The at-will power you use deals +2[W] damage, or +2 dice of damage if it is a nonweapon attack.

Bravo Expert

Prerequisites: 8th level, Bravo

Benefit: You can swap one 6th-level or higher utility power you know for the *brutal instinct* utility power.

Brutal Instinct — Feat Power

With your defiant snarl, the advantage your foes had gained evaporates, giving you an opening.

Encounter
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You are flanked, or your prey gains combat advantage against you
Effect: You do not grant combat advantage to those who triggered this power until the end of your next turn. If your prey is among those who triggered this power, you gain combat advantage against your prey until the end of your next turn.

Bravo Specialist

Prerequisites: 10th level, Bravo

Benefit: You can swap one 9th-level or higher daily attack power you know for the *bravo's finish* power.

Bravo's Finish — Feat Power

If your vicious assault doesn't bring your prey down, it surely shows your prey what the near future holds.

Daily ✦ Reliable
Standard Action
Special: In addition to the keyword above, this power is considered to have the same keywords and range as the at-will power you use with it.
Target: One creature that is your prey
Effect: Use an at-will attack power on the target. If you hit, you deal +2[W] damage, or +2 dice of damage if it is a nonweapon attack, and the target is dazed (save ends).
15th Level: The at-will power you use deals +3[W] damage, or +3 dice of damage if it is a nonweapon attack, and the target is dazed (save ends).
25th Level: The at-will power you use deals +3[W] damage, or +3 dice of damage if it is a nonweapon attack, and the target is stunned until the end of your next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target is dazed (save ends).

Cutthroat [Multiclass Cutthroat]

You are a cautious slayer who studies foes and then maneuvers to bring them down.

Prerequisite: Trained in Bluff

Benefit: You gain training in the Stealth skill. Whenever you make a Bluff check to create a diversion to hide, you can do so as a minor action.

Cutthroat Novice

Prerequisites: 4th level, Cutthroat

Benefit: You can swap one 3rd-level or higher encounter attack power you know for the *sudden retaliation* attack power.

Sudden Retaliation — Feat Power

Faster than the eye can follow, you retaliate against those attacking you or your allies.

Encounter ✦ Rattling
Immediate Interrupt
Special: In addition to the keywords above, this power is considered to have the same keywords and range as the at-will power you use with it.
Trigger: You or an ally is attacked by a creature
Target: The attacking creature
Effect: Use a melee or ranged at-will attack power on the target.
11th Level: The at-will power you use deals +1[W] damage, or +1 die of damage if it is a nonweapon attack.

Cutthroat Expert

Prerequisites: 8th level, Cutthroat

Benefit: You can swap one 6th-level or higher utility power you know for the *cutthroat's scrutiny* utility power.

Cutthroat's Scrutiny — Feat Power

Studying your opponent, you search for a weakness you can take advantage of.

Encounter
Minor Action **Ranged** sight
Target: One creature you can see
Effect: The target grants combat advantage to you until the end of your next turn. During this time, you score a critical hit against the target on a natural roll of 19 or 20.

Cutthroat Specialist

Prerequisites: 10th level, Cutthroat

Benefit: You can swap one 9th-level or higher daily attack power you know for the *quick kill* attack power.

Quick Kill — Feat Power

You slip from the shadows unseen, striking before the enemy knows what happened.

Daily ✦ Reliable
Standard Action
Special: In addition to the keyword above, this power is considered to have the same keywords and range as the at-will power you use with it.
Target: One creature that cannot sense your current location
Effect: Use a melee or ranged at-will attack power on the target. If you hit, you deal +2[W] damage, or +2 dice of damage if it is a nonweapon attack.
15th Level: The at-will power you use deals +3[W] damage, or +3 dice of damage if it is a nonweapon attack.
25th Level: The at-will power you use deals +5[W] damage, or +5 dice of damage if it is a nonweapon attack.

Garrote Training [Multiclass Garrote]

Prerequisites: Str 13, Dex 13

Benefit: You gain proficiency with the garrote. When you use a garrote to successfully grab a target, the target takes a –2 penalty to escape the grab. Each turn you successfully maintain a grab with a garrote used with two hands, you have combat advantage against the target you're grabbing for the purpose of attacking again with the garrote.

If you are a rogue, you can use the garrote with the Sneak Attack class feature and any rogue melee attack power that can be used with a light blade.

Alchemy and the Poisoner

A master poisoner, such as the one presented here, should be skilled at making poisons to achieve full mastery over poisons. Nature and Dungeoneering might allow a character to harvest poisons, and even prepare some of them. That's why one of these skills is required of the would-be poisoner. As DM, however, you are within your rights to require a PC who takes the Poisoner feat to also have the Alchemist feat (*Adventurer's Vault*™ page 21). This can work to make the "poisoner" character theme even more prominent for the character, since he or she could make some poisons that others can use.

Taking this thinking a step further, you can control poisons a little more tightly in your game. To do so, make prepared poisons hard to purchase. Then require the poisoner to find and use alchemical formulas to create poisons like those in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*® (page 51). This way, you can more easily decide what poisons the PCs have access to.

Garrote Novice

Prerequisites: 4th level, Garrote Training

Benefit: You can swap one 3rd-level or higher encounter attack power you know for the *choking grab* attack power.

Choking Grab — Feat Power

You slip your garrote over your enemy's neck, and draw the cord tight.

Encounter ✦ Weapon
Standard Action Melee weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a garrote.
Target: One creature you have combat advantage against
Attack: Strength vs. Reflex or Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn and grabbed.
11th Level: Increase the damage to 3[W].
21st Level: Increase the damage to 4[W].
Special: When you choose this power, choose whether you use Strength or Dexterity to make the attack.

Garrote Expert

Prerequisites: 8th level, Garrote Training

Benefit: You can swap one 6th-level or higher utility power you know for the *body shield* utility power.

Body Shield — Feat Power

Your choking hold with the garrote allows you to manipulate your adversary into harm's way.

Encounter ✦ Weapon
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Requirement: You must be wielding a garrote.
Trigger: You are grabbing a creature, and you are the target of a melee or ranged attack made by an enemy other than the creature you are grabbing.
Effect: The creature you are grabbing becomes the attack's target.

Garrote Specialist

Prerequisites: 10th level, Garrote Training

Benefit: You can swap one 9th-level or higher daily attack power you know for the *strangler's hold* attack power.

Strangler's Hold — Feat Power

With expert skill, you loop the garrote around your victim and draw tight, closing off air and sending your enemy into unconsciousness.

Daily ✦ Reliable, Weapon
Standard Action Melee weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a garrote.
Target: One creature you have combat advantage against
Attack: Strength vs. Reflex or Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage, and the target is dazed (save ends) and grabbed. Each turn you successfully maintain the grab with two hands, you deal the target damage equal to your Strength modifier.
15th Level: Increase the damage to 3[W].
25th Level: Increase the damage to 4[W].
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is stunned instead of dazed (save ends).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is unconscious instead of stunned (save ends).
Special: When you choose this power, choose whether you use Strength or Dexterity to make the attack.

Poisoner [Multiclass Poisoner]

Prerequisite: Training in Dungeoneering or Nature

Benefit: You gain training in the Thievery skill.

Your attacks that have a poison effect ignore the first 5 points of poison resistance. This increases to 10 points at 11th level, and again to 15 points at 21st level. You treat a creature that is immune to poison as if it had resist poison 20.

Poisoner Novice

Prerequisites: 4th level, Poisoner

Benefit: You can swap one 3rd-level or higher encounter attack power you know for the *improvised poison* attack power.

Improvised Poison Feat Power

In your experience with toxins, you always have a little something on hand to make your attack venomous.

Encounter ✦ Poison
Standard Action
Special: In addition to the keyword above, this power is considered to have the same keywords and range as the at-will power you use with it.
Target: One creature
Effect: Use a melee or ranged at-will attack power. If you deal typed damage, you can change that damage type to poison. If you hit, you also deal ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).
11th Level: If you hit, you also deal ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

Poisoner Expert

Prerequisites: 8th level, Poisoner

Benefit: You can swap one 6th-level or higher utility power you know for the *potent poison* utility power.

Potent Poison Feat Power

Your poisons have an insidious effectiveness.

Encounter
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You miss with an attack that has the poison keyword or a poison effect.
Effect: Reroll the attack roll.

Poisoner Specialist

Prerequisites: 10th level, Poisoner

Benefit: You can swap one 9th-level or higher daily attack power you know for the *progressive toxin* attack power.

Progressive Toxin Feat Power

You imbue your attack with a withering poison that diminishes your foe more the longer the poison acts.

Daily ✦ Poison
Standard Action
Special: In addition to the keyword above, this power is considered to have the same keywords and range as the at-will power you use with it.
Target: One creature
Effect: Use a melee or ranged at-will attack power on the target. If you deal typed damage, you can change that damage type to poison. If you hit, the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends both).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is blinded instead of taking the –2 penalty (save ends).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target is blinded and weakened instead of taking the –2 penalty (save ends both).
15th Level: Ongoing 15 poison damage (save ends).
25th Level: The at-will power you use deals +1[W] damage, or +1 die of damage if it is a nonweapon attack, and ongoing 15 poison damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends both).

Technique Feats

Technique feats offer further ways to master the slayer's art by granting enhancements to skill checks and at-will exploits for martial characters.

Black Arrow Style

Prerequisites: Any martial class, trained in Stealth

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Deft Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): If you move into an obscured space or gain cover before making a ranged attack with this exploit, you can make a Stealth check against your target's passive Perception as a free action to gain combat advantage against your target until the start of your next turn.

Twin Strike (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): While you are hidden, you can use this exploit to make a ranged attack, and if you miss with the first ranged attack, you can choose to cancel the second attack to remain hidden from your target. You can also remain hidden if you are hidden but miss with both ranged attacks this exploit allows.

Bloodhound Style

Prerequisite: Any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Careful Attack (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If you hit with the melee version of this exploit against a creature granting combat advantage to you, the target is also slowed until the end of your next turn.

Disheartening Strike (rogue, *Martial Power* page 73): If you hit with the melee version of this exploit against a creature granting combat advantage to you, you can also slide the target 1 square.

Predator's Strike (ranger, *Martial Power* page 43): If you have combat advantage against your target when you use this exploit, your beast companion can shift 1 square before the attack.

Tide of Iron (fighter, *Player's Handbook* page 77): If you hit with this exploit, you can slow the target until the end of your next turn instead of pushing it.

Technique Feats	Prerequisites	Benefit
Black Arrow Style	Any martial class, trained Stealth	Augments at-will exploits
Bloodhound Style	Any martial class	Augment at-will powers
Corellon's Wrath Style	Int 13, any martial class	Augment at-will powers
Cruel Cut Style	Wis 13, any martial class	Augments at-will exploits
Executioner's Style	Con 13, any martial class	Augments at-will exploits
Ghostwalker Style	Any martial class, trained in Stealth	Augment at-will powers
Harlequin Style	Cha 13, any martial class	Augment at-will exploits
Hunting Wolf Style	Any martial class	Augments at-will exploits
Impending Doom Style	Any martial class, trained in Intimidate	Augments at-will exploits
Lolthdark Style	Drow, any martial class	Augment at-will powers
Precision Ambush Style	Any martial class	Augments at-will exploits
Serpent Fang Style	Any martial class, trained in Thievery	Augments at-will exploits
Vigilante Justice Style	Any martial class	Augments at-will exploits

Corellon's Wrath Style

Prerequisites: Int 13, any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Commander's Strike (warlord, *Player's Handbook* page 145): If the target of this exploit is a demon, drow, orc, or spider, your ally can add half your Intelligence modifier (round up) to the attack roll.

Crushing Surge (fighter, *Martial Power* page 7): If you hit a demon, drow, orc, or spider with this exploit, you gain a number of extra temporary hit points equal to your Intelligence modifier.

Riposte Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): If you hit a demon, drow, orc, or spider with this exploit, you can add your Intelligence modifier to the attack roll and damage roll of your riposte.

Twin Strike (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If you hit a demon, drow, orc, or spider with this exploit, you deal extra damage equal to your Intelligence modifier.

Cruel Cut Style

Prerequisites: Wis 13, any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Cleave (fighter, *Player's Handbook* page 77): If no other enemies are adjacent to the target when you hit the target with this exploit, the target takes ongoing damage equal to your Wisdom modifier (save ends).

Furious Smash (warlord, *Player's Handbook* page 145): If your ally hits with the attack this exploit modifies, the target takes ongoing damage equal to your Wisdom modifier (save ends).

Predator's Strike (ranger, *Martial Power* page 43): If your beast companion hits with this exploit against a creature granting combat advantage to it, instead of adding your Wisdom modifier to the damage roll, you can have the target take ongoing damage equal to your Wisdom modifier (save ends).

Riposte Strike (rogue, *Martial Power* page 118): If you hit with the riposte this exploit grants, the target takes ongoing damage equal to your Wisdom modifier (save ends).

Executioner's Style

Prerequisites: Con 13, any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Careful Attack (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If your target is immobilized, restrained, stunned, or unconscious when you hit with this exploit, you deal extra damage equal to your Constitution modifier.

Commander's Strike (warlord, *Player's Handbook* page 145): If your target is immobilized, restrained, stunned, or unconscious, your ally can add your Constitution modifier to the attack roll.

Piercing Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): If your target is immobilized, restrained, stunned, or unconscious when you hit with this exploit, you deal extra damage equal to your Constitution modifier.

Reaping Strike (fighter, *Player's Handbook* page 77): If your target is immobilized, restrained, stunned, or unconscious, and you miss, you deal extra damage equal to your Constitution modifier.

Ghostwalker Style

Prerequisites: Any martial class, trained in Stealth

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Deft Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): If you didn't move before the attack, you can shift 1 square as a free action after the attack.

Nimble Strike (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): While using this exploit, you can move 2 squares before or after the attack, instead of shifting 1 square.

Rivals

"My master congratulates you on your success," said the valet. He pushed a black purse across the table.

Rook left it on the table. The valet's eyes flicked to Rook's violet eyes, then darted to the table.

"Something is wrong," said Rook.

"Well, ah, yes. My master is pleased with your successes and has enjoyed the business arrangement, but, with some regret, he is no longer in need of your services." The valet cleared his throat. "Apologies."

Rook leaned back in his chair. He didn't need the work, but it paid well. "I see," he said.

"Truly, my master has benefited from your unique talents, and it is with great reluctance that he must cease his dealings with you."

"Is he found out? Have we been compromised?" Rook asked.

"No, no one knows about us . . . you."

"Then what is it?" Rook leaned forward, his finger tracing the trigger on his hand crossbow underneath the table.

"You must have heard," said the valet. In response to Rook's blank stare, he added, "The baron's murder?

Rook showed nothing. He knew that, while he and his allies were out of the area, someone had killed the baron. That he knew, and little else.

"Yes, well, you see, the baron's people captured the Hooded Man."

The Hooded Man was, in this trade, perhaps Rook's better. But he was expensive and hard to find.

"They found him at the Salty Mug. Word has it they were ready for a fight, but the Hooded Man went without complaint. He even let them shackle him. They took him to the baron's dungeons where he was to await trial.

"The next morning, servants found the baron dead in his room. His neck had been crushed. The guards scoured the palace, and when they reached the dungeons, they found the Hooded Man missing. His cell door was closed and locked, and all his gear, his weapons, armor, and tools, were untouched in the vault where the guards had left them. The only witness was the baron's mistress. She spoke nonsense, saying the darkness came to life, coiled around the baron, and squeezed him to death."

Rook still said nothing.

"The Hooded Man was responsible. He had to be. He planned everything all along. My master decided the Hooded Man would be his agent in further endeavors. You are good, sir, but not as good as the Hooded Man. No one needs two assassins, so . . . well, you understand."

"I do. Does this mean your master has found the Hooded Man?" Rook asked.

"I'm not at liberty to say . . ."

"That is a shame. Farewell, friend," said Rook. He pulled the trigger, sending the bolt into the valet's abdomen. As Rook headed for the tavern's front door, he scooped up the purse and left the gasping man in a spreading pool of blood.

A moment later, the shadows parted near the table. From them stepped another figure, features hidden by a black hood. Without even a glance at the dying valet, the Hooded Man followed Rook, setting out to claim his next commission.

Harlequin Style

Prerequisites: Cha 13, any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Brash Assault (warlord, *Martial Power* page 103): Against the target of this exploit, you gain a bonus to defenses equal to your Charisma modifier until the start of your next turn.

Brash Strike (fighter, *Player's Handbook* page 77): Against the target of this exploit, you gain a bonus to defenses equal to your Charisma modifier until the start of your next turn.

Deft Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): You can move 3 squares before this attack, instead of 2. Add your Charisma modifier to your defenses against opportunity attacks provoked by this movement.

Hit and Run (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If you move after the using this exploit, add your Charisma modifier to your defenses against opportunity attacks made against you during that movement.

Hunting Wolf Style

Prerequisite: Any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Crushing Surge (fighter, *Martial Power* page 7): While charging, you can use this exploit in place of a melee basic attack.

Deft Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): If you chose not to move before the attack while using this exploit, you can move after the attack.

Hit and Run (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If you move on the same turn after using this exploit, you do not provoke opportunity attacks from any enemy when you leave the first square adjacent to the target.

Wolf Pack Tactics (warlord, *Player's Handbook* page 145): The ally you allow to shift can be within 2 squares of you, instead of adjacent to you or the target.

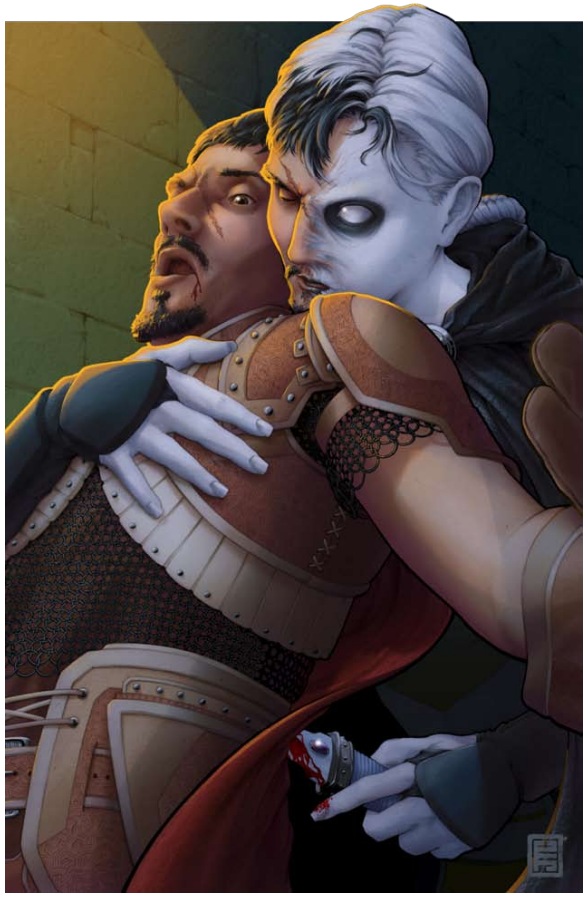
Impending Doom Style

Prerequisites: Any martial class, trained in Intimidate

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Brash Assault (warlord, *Player's Handbook* page 145): If your ally gains a basic attack due to this exploit and hits the target, the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Cleave (fighter, *Player's Handbook* page 77): You mark any target you damage with this exploit.



Riposte Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): If you hit with the riposte this exploit grants, the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Twin Strike (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If you hit with both attacks this exploit grants, one target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Lolthdark Style

Prerequisites: Drow, any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Cleave (fighter, *Player's Handbook* page 77): If you hit a target within your *cloud of darkness* racial power with this exploit, all other enemies within the area of the *cloud of darkness* also take damage equal to your Strength modifier.

Disheartening Strike (rogue, *Martial Power* page 73): If you hit a target within your *cloud of darkness* racial power with this exploit, all other enemies within the area of the *cloud of darkness* also suffer the effect of the rattling keyword.

Twin Strike (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If you are within the area of your *cloud of darkness* racial power, and you move after using this exploit, the *cloud of darkness* moves with you.

Wolf Pack Tactics (warlord, *Player's Handbook* page 145): If you use this exploit while you and the target are within the area of your *cloud of darkness* racial power, the ally you designate is immune to the effect of your *cloud of darkness* for its duration.

Precision Ambush Style

Prerequisite: Any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Disheartening Strike (rogue, *Martial Power* page 73): If you hit with this exploit during a surprise round, the target grants combat advantage to you until the end of your next turn.

Footwork Lure (fighter, *Martial Power* page 7): While you charge during the surprise round, you can use this exploit in place of a melee basic attack.

Opening Shove (warlord, *Martial Power* page 103): While you charge during a surprise round, you can use this exploit in place of a melee basic attack.

Twin Strike (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If you hit with this exploit during a surprise round, you deal extra damage equal to your Strength modifier if you are making melee attacks, or your Dexterity modifier if you are making ranged attacks.

Serpent Fang Style

Prerequisites: Any martial class, trained in Thievery

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Careful Attack (ranger, *Player's Handbook* page 105): If you hit with this exploit, you also gain a +2 bonus to the attack roll for any secondary poison attack.

Deft Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): Rather than moving 2 squares before the attack, you can apply a poison you possess to the weapon as a free action.

Sure Strike (fighter, *Player's Handbook* page 77): If you hit with this exploit, you also gain a +2 bonus to the attack roll for any secondary poison attack.

Viper's Strike (warlord, *Player's Handbook* page 145): If the target of your attack suffers from a poison effect and it shifts before the start of your next turn, the target also grants combat advantage to you and your allies until the start of your next turn.

Vigilante Justice Style

Prerequisite: Any martial class

Benefit: You gain a benefit with any of the following powers you possess.

Brash Strike (fighter, *Martial Power* page 7): If an adjacent enemy marked by you makes an attack that doesn't include you as a target, you can use this exploit in place of the melee basic attack that Combat Challenge allows.

Circling Strike (ranger, *Martial Power* page 43): If an enemy hits you or your beast companion during that enemy's turn, you deal extra damage equal to your Wisdom modifier if you hit with this exploit during your next turn.

Commander's Strike (warlord, *Player's Handbook* page 145): If, on its last turn, the target hit the ally you choose to benefit from this exploit, that ally has combat advantage against that target for the melee basic attack this exploit allows.

Riposte Strike (rogue, *Player's Handbook* page 118): If you hit with this exploit, you can riposte if the target attacks you or any ally adjacent to you before the start of your next turn.

Paragon Paths

Blightbeast

"You must die so that others might live."

Prerequisite: Druid class

Death and decay are as much part of nature as is birth and life. For the new to awaken in the world, the old must pass away. Although many druids champion life and a healthy wild, a few darkened souls embrace nature's darker side, immersing themselves in the grim necessity that plays just as an important part in the natural cycle as does birth. Like other druids, they fiercely protect the spirits and the wild from harm, but they use nature's darkest elements as weapons against their enemies.

In becoming a blightbeast, you identify with these sinister elements and come to embody death. The power you use might manifest in your humanoid appearance. Or you might hide your kinship to death until you assume your beast form, at which point your true nature is revealed.

You might be a coldhearted killer. Instead, you could use your newfound power to make room for new life. You can use your evocations to destroy those who threaten nature's splendor, or commit yourself to wiping out the enemies of the natural order. Your powers are as useful against unnatural and natural creatures alike.

Blightbeast Path Features

Blight Action (11th level): Whenever you spend an action point to make an attack, all enemies adjacent to you must move 1 square away from you or take ongoing necrotic damage equal to your Constitution modifier (save ends).

Blighted Wild Shape (11th level): Whenever you use your wild shape class feature, the animal form you assume has a deathlike aspect—perhaps even appearing undead. While in your beast form, you gain resist 5 necrotic, and your attack evocations that have the beast form keyword deal extra necrotic damage equal to your Constitution modifier. At 21st level, you gain resist 10 necrotic while in your beast form.

Blightborn (16th level): While in beast form, you ignore any resist necrotic your target has. When you hit with a beast form attack evocation, a creature that doesn't normally have resist necrotic damage gains vulnerable 5 necrotic until the end of your next turn.

Blightbeast Evocations

Blighted Agony — **Blightbeast Attack 11**

Rot spreads its black tendrils from the wound you delivered, doubling your adversary over with pain.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form, Implement, Necrotic, Primal
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + Wisdom modifier necrotic damage, you slide the target 1 square, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

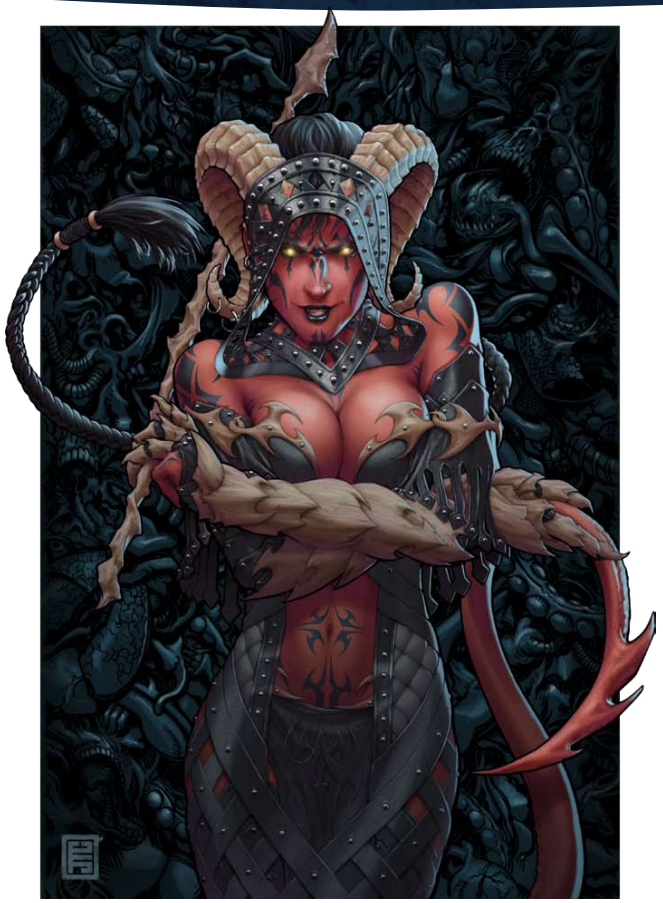
Maggot Form — **Blightbeast Utility 12**

You become a mass of maggots, spilling across the ground to reconstitute your form in a place nearby.

Encounter ✦ Beast Form, Primal
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: Move a number of squares equal to your speed + your Constitution modifier. With this movement, you can move through enemy spaces, you ignore difficult terrain, and without squeezing, you can move through spaces a single maggot could move through. You take half damage from any melee attack that hits you during this movement.

Blight Locus — **Blightbeast Attack 20**

Corruption spills from the wounds you tear into your foe, staggering it so it can blight its allies.
Daily ✦ Beast Form, Implement, Necrotic, Primal
Standard Action **Melee** touch
Target: One creature
Attack: Wisdom vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + Wisdom modifier necrotic damage, ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends), and you slide the target 2 squares.
Miss: Half damage, and the target slides 1 square.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, any enemy that starts its turn adjacent to the target takes 5 necrotic damage.



Nightmare Weaver

"I am the chill in your blood, the raised hairs on your neck, the thudding heartbeat brought on by your worst dreams. I am death, and I come for you."

Prerequisites: Warlock class, trained in Intimidate

You use power drawn from your pact to expose your enemies' doubts and fears, using these terrors as your weapons. You might visit retribution on those who serve evil and destruction, or you might be a ruthless killer, hunting down those who offend you. Regardless, you are a creature of nightmare—a thing of the shadows—and those who earn your ire can know only a terrifying end.

Nightmare Weaver Path Features

Nightmarish Action (11th level): Whenever you spend an action point to make an attack, you can slide creatures affected by your Warlock's Curse 1 square. Those you slide take a –2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Insidious Curse (11th level): When an enemy under your Warlock's Curse drops to 0 hit points, you can place a Warlock's Curse on the enemy nearest to you as an immediate reaction. If the nearest enemy is already affected by your Warlock's Curse, you can slide it 2 squares, and it takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Shaking Displays (16th level): All your warlock encounter attack spells, along with *painful delusion* below, gain the rattling keyword.

Nightmare Weaver Spells

Painful Delusion — Nightmare Weaver Attack 11

You sink a psychic claw into your opponent's mind, awakening its worst fears.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 1d10 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn. Each attack that hits the target until the start of your next turn deals 5 extra psychic damage.

Dread Disappearance — Nightmare Weaver Utility 12

To those you have cursed, you seem to disappear in a cloud of swirling darkness.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Illusion
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You gain concealment from Shadow Walk.
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you are invisible to any creature affected by your Warlock's Curse.

Nightmare Stalker — Nightmare Weaver Attack 20

Using the enemy's worst fears as a weapon, you conjure a shadowy entity to drive your foe mad with terror.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Conjuration, Illusion, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Effect: You conjure a Medium illusory creature that lasts until the end of your next turn. This creature can affect only the target. It appears in a square adjacent to the target and makes the following melee attack against the target. While adjacent to the creature, the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls unless it is immune to fear. The target cannot move through the creature's space, but others can. If the target misses you or one of your allies, you can use an immediate reaction to have the creature make the following melee attack against the target. If the target drops to 0 hit points, this power ends.
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn.
Sustain Minor: The creature persists until the end of your next turn, and you can move it 7 squares.

SUPERIOR MELEE WEAPON

Two-Handed							
Weapon	**Prof**	**Damage**	**Range**	**Price**	**Weight**	**Group**	**Properties**
Garrote	+3	1d4	–	1 gp	1 lb.	Garrote	High crit, small

SUPERIOR RANGED WEAPON

Two-Handed							
Weapon	**Prof**	**Damage**	**Range**	**Price**	**Weight**	**Group**	**Properties**
Blowgun	+3	1d4	5/10	5 gp	2 lb.	Blowgun	Load minor, small

Killer's Arsenal

To be an effective killer, you must be prepared for everything. Other than planning, nothing gives better assurances of a successful mission than proper equipment. The following mundane, alchemical, and magic items represent only a few tools of the bloody trade.

Weapons

Blowgun: This long tubular weapon is used, by blowing on one end, to launch darts and other agents.

Garrote: This strangling tool is a length of wire or knotted rope with handles at either end. If you're proficient with the garrote, you can use it to deal the garrote's weapon damage as part of a grab attack.

Mundane Equipment

Camouflaged Clothing: This clothing is patterned so you blend into shadows. While wearing it, you gain a +1 item bonus to Stealth checks to hide.

Crowbar: When a lock is too tricky to circumvent, brute strength can sometimes do the trick. A crowbar grants a +2 item bonus to Athletics checks made to open locked doors or containers.

Disguise Kit: A disguise kit includes everything from cosmetics to prosthetics—all that you might need to conceal your identity. While using a disguise kit, you gain a +2 item bonus to Bluff checks made to pass off your disguises.

Footpads: These felt soles fit over shoes or boots and help dampen the noise you create while walking. The footpads grant you a +1 item bonus to Stealth checks made to move quietly.

Glass Cutter: When breaking a window is not an option, you can use a glass cutter to create the opening you need. Using a glass cutter takes 1 minute and it opens a hole large enough to fit your arm through.

MUNDANE EQUIPMENT

Item	Price	Weight
Ammunition		
Blowgun needles (10)	**1 gp**	**–**
Camouflaged clothing	**30 gp**	**4 lb.**
Crowbar	**2 gp**	**4 lb.**
Disguise kit	**30 gp**	**5 lb.**
Footpads	**5 gp**	**–**
Glass cutter	**25 gp**	**5 lb.**

Alchemical Items

Some of the best tools in a slayer's arsenal are alchemical items. Inexpensive to produce, designed with short-term benefits, and useful for dispatching a mark quickly and efficiently, alchemical items provide just the edge a killer needs to complete his or her mission. In addition to these new alchemical items, you can benefit from those presented in the *Adventurer's Vault* and the upcoming *Eberron® Player's Guide*.

Drowsy Dust

Level: 4
Category: Poison
Time: 30 minutes
Component Cost: See below
Market Price: 160 gp

When inhaled, the powder overwhelms a target, causing it to become sleepy and careless.

Drowsy Dust **Level 3+**

You blow the dust from the palm of your hand so it spreads through the air and clouds your opponent's senses.

Lvl 4	80 gp	Lvl 19	8,400 gp
Lvl 9	320 gp	Lvl 24	21,000 gp
Lvl 14	1,600 gp	Lvl 29	210,000 gp

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Standard Action. Make an attack: Ranged 2/5; +7 vs. Fortitude; the target takes a -2 penalty to defenses and a -5 penalty to Perception checks (save ends both).

Level 9: +12 vs. Fortitude
Level 14: +17 vs. Fortitude
Level 19: +22 vs. Fortitude
Level 24: +27 vs. Fortitude
Level 29: +32 vs. Fortitude

Eyesting

Level: 4
Category: Poison
Time: 1 hour
Component Cost: See below
Market Price: 240 gp

When blown into an enemy's face, the fine particles burn the eyes, nose, and skin, effectively blinding the target.

Eyesting Level 3+

The fine black powder has a bitter smell and burns the skin.

Lvl 4	80 gp	Lvl 19	8,400 gp
Lvl 9	320 gp	Lvl 24	21,000 gp
Lvl 14	1,600 gp	Lvl 29	210,000 gp

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable ✦ Poison): Standard Action. Make an attack: Ranged 2/5; +7 vs. Fortitude; the target is blinded until the end of your next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends). Creatures that do not rely on sight to detect other creatures are immune to the blinding effect, and instead suffer the aftereffect as the initial effect, with no subsequent aftereffect.

Level 9: +12 vs. Fortitude
Level 14: +17 vs. Fortitude
Level 19: +22 vs. Fortitude
Level 24: +27 vs. Fortitude
Level 29: +32 vs. Fortitude

Flashbang Powder

Level: 8
Category: Volatile
Time: 1 hour
Component Cost: See below
Market Price: 500 gp

When thrown against a hard surface, this paper packet rips open and exposes the reagents to air, causing them to explode and smoke.

Flashbang Powder Level 8+

The packet explodes with a bright flash and a sharp report, filling the area with smoke and defying multiple senses.

Lvl 8	250 gp	Lvl 23	34,000 gp
Lvl 13	1,300 gp	Lvl 28	170,000 gp
Lvl 18	6,800 gp		

Alchemical Item

Power (Consumable • Zone): Standard Action. Make an attack: Close burst 1; +10 vs. Fortitude; as a free action, you can make a Stealth check against the target with a +4 bonus. If you succeed, you are hidden from that enemy until the end of your turn or until you attack. Creatures that do not rely on sight to detect other creatures are immune to this effect. *Effect:* The burst creates a zone, which contains smoke that lasts until the end of your next turn. The smoke lightly obscures the area.

Level 13: +15 vs. Fortitude
Level 18: +20 vs. Fortitude
Level 23: +25 vs. Fortitude
Level 28: +30 vs. Fortitude

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb contributed design to such books as the *Forgotten Realms Player's Guide, Draconomicon™: Chromatic Dragons, Manual of the Planes, P2: Demon Queen's Enclave, Martial Power, Player's Handbook 2, Eberron Campaign Guide, Eberron Player's Guide, Divine Power, Adventurer's Vault 2, Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons, Primal Power,* as well as numerous articles for D&D Insider. Robert lives in Tennessee.

Party Building

by Robert J. Schwalb

Illustrations by Howard Lyon

A new *Player's Handbook* means new opportunities for character creation and new foundations on which Dungeon Masters can build campaigns. Even in groups still striving toward completing their destiny quests, a new *Player's Handbook* helps shape the game's content by providing different avenues through which players can express their character ideas and discover new tactics to overcome the opposition. Within the crisp new pages, you'll find new classes, new feats, paragon paths, epic destinies, magic items, and much more, all waiting for you to explore.

Much ink has been spent on building characters, from the basic tips covered in the build descriptions to the broad overview described in the opening pages of the *Player's Handbook,* but you can find little on the subject of building the adventuring party. The party is the glue binding disparate heroes into an effective fighting unit and coalition bound by common cause and purpose. A group of heroes might descend into the dungeon together, but they have no chance of surviving unless they work as a team. This idea lives in the heart of this article, and it helps novices and veterans alike to look at character creation in a new way and work together to create a dynamic and capable team built on principles of cooperation rather than on individual whims.

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The *Dungeons & Dragons*® game encourages party building already. By assigning each class a role, the game gives you have a good idea about how your character is supposed to contribute to the party. Since there are four roles, it's not a big logical leap to think it's a good idea to have a representative of each role in the party. You don't have to do so, though. You can find plenty of ways to compensate for a lack of one role or another. By accounting for each role, making good class and race combinations, and covering holes, you can turn your expertise into an advantage. It might even give you and your fellows the edge you need to claim victory, attain glory, and ascend into legend.

Basics

The very first thing you do as a player in a game is create your character. The character is your window into the game world, as well as your means of participation in the story and in the encounters unfolding over the course of game play. Your character choice is important not only for your enjoyment, but also in how you contribute to the team. In a modest-sized game, character choice is often determined by the party's need: with holes represented by a missing role, such as a defender or leader.

In a smaller group, you might not have enough players to cover the four roles, which forces the team to emphasize their class's secondary roles or to broaden their capabilities with multiclass feats. For larger groups, the team's needs aren't as clear. In a seven-player group, is an extra leader more important than an extra defender? Or should you invest in extra strikers? What about an extra controller?

Most gaming groups feel their way through the process of team building, letting it develop organically through game play and personal taste, and that's fine. Five players with three strikers and two defenders can manage well enough, just as could a group consisting of five leaders. But experienced players know that imbalanced parties can make some encounters extraordinarily easy and others disastrously hard. For some groups, careful party balance might not be necessary. But for groups who like to have the tools to take on just about any encounter, approaching the character creation process with an eye toward party balance might be just what is needed to experience the full power of the 4th Edition game.

Two Approaches

There are at least two approaches to party building. One is the bottom-up approach. Here, each player, with minimal consultation, settles on the class and race he or she wants to play and builds the character. A fine approach and one used by many groups, it does, as discussed above, run the risk of imbalance, resulting in absent roles or too many representatives of a specific role. Another is the top-down approach. Before anyone chooses a class or race, or makes any decision about the character, the group comes together to establish the tone and style the group will take. From this perspective, a group might aim for a balanced party by deciding which roles they need to fill and figure out who will fill each one. Of course, a group might decide to jettison any notion of party balance and intentionally build an imbalanced group. This is fine too, especially since the group can always select classes with secondary roles.

Role Recap

The *Player's Handbook* describes the four roles and their function within the adventuring group, but it's worth examining them a little closer. A role specifies what a character of a specific class is supposed to do within a group, or, if you're a sports enthusiast, it assigns the character a position on the team, not unlike a running back, goalie, or guard. If you leave a position unfilled, the other positions have to work harder. Furthermore, if two characters fill the same position, odds are they'll step on each other's toes. Knowing what your role is supposed to do helps you be a more effective contributor to the party.

Controller

Druid, Invoker, Wizard

The controller manages the battlefield. Armed with powers capable of striking several targets at once, the controller can handle crowds with ease. Many controllers can create or modify terrain to restrict movement and control the combat's flow. Controllers can bestow harmful conditions or "debuffs," many of which help strikers get past high defenses and hit the targets they hurt the most.

Many Targets, Low Damage: The more targets you can affect with a power, the less damage the power deals. Bursts and blasts are the controller's weapons, so more often than not you're dealing less damage than your counterparts. You are best at wiping out minions and finishing off bloodied enemies.

Artillery: Most controllers are fragile. They lack the defenses and hit points other characters enjoy, meaning a hit costs a controller more than it might a defender. So, you should select powers that hit your enemies at range to make sure enemies can't reach you if they survive the attack. In addition, many of your ranged powers control or restrict movement. This gives you the advantage of maintaining good distance from your opponents. Also, you can keep a target pinned down for the striker or defender to finish off.

Terrain Maker: Many controller powers interact with terrain, either changing existing terrain or creating terrain to hamper or damage enemies. You can control crowds, direct traffic, and maneuver enemies, funneling them into the teeth of a tough defender or aggressive striker.

Toolbox: Your utility powers and access to rituals make you the best at dealing with noncombat challenges. You can gather information, create magic items, and even restore fallen comrades.

Defender

Fighter, Paladin, Swordmage, Warden

The defender is the party's bulwark, the deadly wall containing and destroying anything in reach. Defenders all have some means of keeping their enemies focused on them, at the very least imposing the marked condition, but also instilling another nasty effect to punish opponents whose eyes and attacks wander elsewhere. As a defender, you might work with another character, helping the ally get combat advantage to trigger damage spikes like Sneak Attack, or you might hunker down and protect the controllers and ranged strikers in your group, being the first line of defense against any foe.

Black Hole: Your main job as a defender is to lock down the bad guys and keep their attention fixed on you. You achieve this by marking your opponents. All defender classes provide a little something extra so when an enemy ignores you, you can correct its mistake with a heaping spoonful of damage. You might not take the enemy out—strikers are good at snagging kills—but you can always keep the enemy pinned down long enough for someone else to do the job.

Enabler: Your presence enables other allies to do what they do best. You can help set up a rogue's Sneak Attack, keep a target pinned so a warlock can curse the opponent and fry it with *eldritch blast*, or contain a group of smaller targets so a controller to erase them from the battlefield.

Wall: With a high Armor Class, great hit points, and plenty of healing surges, you are all about containment. You are the insurmountable wall on the battlefield. By blocking movement, marking, and delivering punishing attacks, you make sure few enemies can escape you.

Leader

Bard, Cleric, Shaman, Warlord

Leaders hold the party together. They keep the defenders defending, strikers striking, and controllers controlling. Leaders can often step into other roles, helping to defend allies against enemy attacks or deliver crippling attacks that allow strikers do their worst.

Booster: When you're around, your allies are the better for it. Many leader powers provide boosts to attack rolls, defenses, temporary hit points, and a slew of other benefits. Sometimes granting these benefits might mean you forgo making an attack, but when it's a chance to deal 1d8 + 4 damage or giving the barbarian a chance to dish out 2d6 + 6 extra damage, it's not a big sacrifice.

Healer: As a leader, one of your main jobs is to keep your allies on their feet throughout the fight. In most cases, you help allies spend healing surges and give them a little extra, too. You might also grant temporary hit points, regeneration, or the ability to make extra saving throws to remove annoying conditions. This aspect of a leader is what makes the role one of the most essential on the battlefield.

Tactician: Finally, you can also act as the tactical leader by creating opportunities for your allies to get in extra attacks, shift, or cover other allies' escape.

Striker

Avenger, Barbarian, Ranger, Rogue, Sorcerer, Warlock

The striker is all about taking out the enemy. With a damage spike (Sneak Attack, Hunter's Quarry, and so on), strikers deal more damage than any other role in the game. Most times, this comes from increased damage, but it can also result from greater accuracy.

Artillery: Generally, there are two types of strikers: melee and ranged. Rogues and rangers can do both. As artillery, you fling death at range, picking out targets and hitting them hard. Once they drop, you're ready to take out another foe. If you're artillery, you need to let the defenders and leaders do their thing, while you hang back and pick off the stragglers.

Guerrilla: You might be the other kind of striker—the guerrilla. If so, you skirt around the battlefield, slipping in to hit hard and then dance away before your opponent can respond. Some melee strikers might stick around, hammering at their foes until they fall—the avenger, ranger, and barbarian are all good examples. Even so, you probably want to stay with a defender so when you do hit, your target can't turn around and do you the same favor.

Role Replacement: Many strikers can also fill other roles as needed. A two-blade ranger or rageblood barbarian can easily step into the defender role, while a scourge warlock is almost as good as a controller. If your group is short a role, odds are it will fall to you to pick up the slack.

The Fifth Role

There's no fifth role, really, but when you have five or more players, some role overlap happens. The "fifth" role is the duplicated role. The role taken by the fifth character helps to determine the party's tactics, but it also can help to shore up weaknesses, patching holes left by challenged characters and novice players.

Extra Controller: Two controllers means the group can address just about any challenge. Control-heavy parties have a tactical edge in combat and are better suited to dealing with larger groups, especially when eight or more minions are involved.

When two controllers work together, they can layer area effects, stack crippling conditions on enemy leaders, and wipe the battlefield of minions and lesser creatures. Although it's tempting to go for the overkill gained from two control-focused characters, a better strategy is to use the second controller to cover a secondary role, ideally a striker. The war wizard or wrathful invoker complement the control wizard or guardian druid, and converts some of the stronger area effects to focused damage attacks useful for bringing an enemy down.

Extra Defender: Two defenders can stop just about anything from reaching soft PCs in the second rank. Controllers and ranged strikers can attack with impunity as the defenders lock down anything near. Defender-rich parties excel at containment and are devastating against smaller numbered opponents such as elites, solos, and small groups of opponents.

When two defenders focus their attacks against a single opponent, unless one defender takes a nasty hit, their marking mechanisms are redundant since a creature can carry only one mark at a time. Defenders should spread out to block flanks and catch enemy groups rather than clump together. A second defender might also benefit from developing secondary role responsibilities, either through multiclassing or choosing powers emphasizing a build with strong secondary role rider effects. The protecting paladin, for example, adds a little extra leader to the group and is excellent support for the great weapon fighter.

Extra Leader: Hit points are never gone for long in a two-leader party. The defender finds he or she never runs out of hit points, can shrug off ongoing damage and conditions, and can withstand the worst attacks as support comes from two directions. Leaders can step up and help defend, since they are often capable warriors in their own right.

Two leaders can keep the PCs going, but if both fill strong supporting roles—an inspiring warlord and devoted cleric for example, the defender might not be enough to block incoming traffic. As with all double roles, use the opportunity a second leader presents to emphasize the common defender aspects one finds in many leader classes. A battle cleric, tactical warlord, or panther shaman can help protect fragile characters.

Extra Striker: Strikers are popular for good reason—they dish out the damage. Having two strikers in the group is perhaps one of the most common five player arrangements since it allows for one ranged striker and one melee striker. Provided the strikers keep moving, the defender can focus on protecting the controller, while the leader keeps everybody hitting. The only drawback to two strikers is the party has fewer hit points among the members and might have a glass jaw when the defender goes down. But then again, most groups with two strikers can deal enough damage to prevent the enemy from ever coming close enough to cause this sort of trouble.

Missing Roles

Ideally, all four roles see equal representation in a party, but sometimes this isn't the case. Adventuring parties can comprise a wide variety of characters, sometimes to their detriment. Missing one or more roles doesn't mean the whole enterprise is doomed. It just means everyone has to invest a little more time in careful character design.

Missing Controller

A myth among *D&D* players is that the controller is expendable. Controllers have rituals, toolbox utility powers, and game-changing attack powers capable of shifting momentum from a loss to a victory. Still, controllers can be challenging characters to play and in the wrong hands, what would normally be an asset could very well become a liability.

If no one jumps on the controller role, there are ways to fill the role without having to invest in multiclass feats. One way is to make sure the existing classes have strong controller secondary roles (see page $@@)—rather than play a ranger, choose an avenger or sorcerer instead. Alternatively, a player might choose a race with a close or area attack, such as the dragonborn's *dragon breath* attack. Finally, one character should always have access to the Ritual Caster feat.

Missing Defender

A missing defender is a conspicuous absence. Little stops the enemy from washing over the party, so soft characters—ranged strikers and controllers—are at greater risk. Luckily, groups can invest in leaders to keep everyone above bloodied. Or they can pick up strikers to increase the group's damage output. Sometimes these advantages aren't enough, so other character choices become important.

Filling the defender's role is tricky since few other classes can lock down their enemies. Instead of marking opponents, other characters must threaten foes by dealing considerable damage, or by putting themselves in harm's way to protect the party. The barbarian deals enough damage and has plenty of hit points to keep an enemy's attention, while the battle cleric and bravura warlord can make strong melee attacks and use enabling powers. A scourge warlock has the hit points to soak a few extra attacks, while a two-blade ranger can deliver punishing attacks almost equal to those used by the barbarian.

Other characters should invest in feats and powers that provide escape routes, such as free shifts, teleportation, or pushing enemies away. Furthermore, consider high hit point classes or classes with close blast and burst powers to drive off enemies who come too close.

Missing Leader

Even though every character can use second wind, going without a leader is risky and puts more pressure on the rest of the group. Characters might have to resort to potions, sacrifice valuable actions to use second wind, or take extended rests more frequently.

A good mix of secondary leaders can replace an actual leader. A paladin can bolster allies if need be and an invoker can protect overwhelmed allies if the battle turns south. The barbarian and druid can help here, too.

Outside of these choices, the party can adjust by embracing the best defense is a good offense mentality. As long as the party can outstrip their enemies' ability to deal damage, the party should be able to emerge from a battle intact. To this end, the group should invest in extra melee strikers such as a brutal rogue and a two-blade ranger. Working together, they can dispatch most enemies before they cause trouble.

Of the characters, the defenders are the ones who suffer the most. Without a leader to buttress their defense, they can easily be overwhelmed when locking down several enemies at once. Defender players might choose races with boosts to Constitution, such as the dwarf, goliath, minotaur, or warforged, or at the very least, pick up the Durable and Toughness feats.

Missing Striker

A rarity to be sure, given the sheer number of striker classes available, missing a striker means that the group has reduced damage output and their flexibility to handle different sorts of encounters. Since the striker is not present to spike the group's damage, the burden of dispatching enemies falls to the defenders and controllers, and sometimes the leaders. Combats sometimes take longer, but the group is likely more resilient with the added benefit of an extra defender or leader.

The obvious choice to fill this hole is the druid. A druid can function as a controller in humanoid form and a striker in beast form. Aside from the druid, the swordmage is good too, since the class can use its mark to maneuver around the battlefield. A tactical warlord can increase the amount of damage a defender deals, granting extra attacks or boosts to attack rolls. Finally, adding either an invoker or wizard can increase the party's damage output.

Multiclassing Solutions

Multiclassing feats provides a way to diversify character options, allowing characters to dabble in a mixture of powers within the same role, such as a fighter who also dips into the paladin class. It can also help characters cover absent roles. Multiclassing is tricky, since it requires a heavy feat investment to realize all the benefits, while diminishing the character's general effectiveness within his or her primary role.

Complications

Every multiclass character faces the same challenges. The first is accuracy. Unless your primary class's powers and your multiclass's powers use the same ability score for attacks, your multiclass powers are always inferior to your primary class powers. For example, if you are a wizard and you want to fill the striker role too by dabbling in warlock, you can expect a 1- to 3-point drop in accuracy when using your warlock spells.

The solution here is simple: restrict your multiclass choices to classes whose attack ability matches that of your primary class—wizard/swordmage, cleric/paladin, fighter/ranger, and so on. Alternatively, rather than invest a score into the secondary ability needed for your primary class, slip it into the attack ability for your multiclass. This is where non-optimized class-race combinations are often strongest. So, if you were building a wizard/warlock, you might choose the drow race, and place your 18 in Intelligence, 14 in Charisma, 11 in Dexterity, 10s in Constitution and Wisdom, and your 8 in Strength. After ability score adjustments, you'd have Str 8, Con 10, Dex 13, Int 18, Wis 10, and Cha 16. Your Dexterity can still give you a boost when using Wand of Accuracy, but *darkfire* also helps you hit high-defense targets with your warlock powers. Furthermore, you're only 1 point behind in accuracy when using your warlock powers.

There's also the issue of weapons and implements. You have only so many magic items at your disposal, so is it worth sacrificing a high-level neck slot item or armor for an extra implement to use with a handful of powers?

Again, the solution is apparent. Choose a class that uses the same tools, weapons, or implements. When it comes to implements, look for identical implements. You might not get the full benefits of the property when using the implement with your multiclass powers, but the enhancement bonus still applies.

	—Recommended Multiclass by Role—			
Class	Controller	Defender	Leader	Striker
Avenger	Invoker	Swordmage	Cleric	—
Barbarian	Druid	Warden	Warlord	—
Bard	Wizard	Paladin or Swordmage	—	Warlock
Cleric	Invoker	Paladin	—	Avenger
Druid	—	Warden	Shaman	Avenger
Fighter	Druid	—	Warlord	Barbarian
Invoker	—	Swordmage	Cleric or Shaman	Avenger or Warlock
Paladin	Invoker	—	Cleric or Warlord	Barbarian
Ranger	Druid	Fighter	Warlord	—
Rogue	Druid or Wizard	Fighter	Warlord	—
Shaman	Druid	Swordmage	—	Avenger
Sorcerer	Wizard	Paladin	Bard	—
Swordmage	Wizard	—	Warlord	Barbarian
Warden	Druid	—	Warlord	Barbarian
Warlock	Wizard	Paladin or Swordmage	Bard	—
Warlord	Wizard	Fighter or Paladin	—	Ranger
Wizard	—	Swordmage	Bard	Avenger

Race	Optimal Multiclass Combinations
Deva	Avenger, Cleric, Druid, Invoker, Shaman, Swordmage, Wizard
Dragonborn	Bard, Fighter, Paladin, Sorcerer, Warden, Warlock, Warlord
Drow	Bard, Ranger, Rogue, Warlock, Wizard
Dwarf	Avenger, Cleric, Druid, Invoker, Shaman
Eladrin	Ranger, Rogue, Swordmage, Wizard
Elf	Avenger, Cleric, Druid, Invoker, Ranger, Rogue, Shaman
Genasi	Fighter, Ranger, Swordmage, Warden, Warlord, Wizard
Goliath	Barbarian, Fighter, Ranger, Warden, Warlord
Gnoll	Ranger, Rogue
Gnome	Bard, Swordmage, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard
Half-Elf	Bard, Sorcerer, Warlock
Half-Orc	Fighter, Ranger, Rogue, Warden, Warlord
Halfling	Bard, Ranger, Rogue, Sorcerer, Warlock
Human	—
Minotaur	Barbarian, Fighter, Ranger, Warden, Warlord
Longtooth Shifter	Avenger, Cleric, Druid, Fighter, Invoker, Ranger, Shaman, Warden, Warlord
Razorclaw Shifter	Avenger, Cleric, Druid, Invoker, Ranger, Rogue, Shaman
Tiefling	Bard, Sorcerer, Swordmage, Warlock, Wizard
Warforged	Barbarian, Fighter, Ranger, Warden, Warlord

Good combinations include fighter/barbarian, cleric/paladin, ranger/warlord, wizard/warlock, avenger/cleric, and druid/shaman.

For more details on multiclassing, consult the tables here. The first describes ideal multiclass combinations and accounts for similar attack abilities, matching implements (where possible), and ease of entry based on typical ability score arrays. The second table defines which races are best at picking up multiclass feats for specific classes. Putting the two together, you can identify good combinations for race and class when building a multiclass character.

Size Matters

A typical adventuring group features five characters. Smaller groups (three or fewer players) have to go without certain roles, while larger groups (seven or more players) see role overlap. There are no hard and fast rules about what types of roles should be present in a small or large group, but the following tips should help you avoid the pitfalls that might arise.

Small Groups

In a small group, you must sacrifice at least one role. A group without a leader means it's up to the PCs to see to their own healing, while a group without a controller might find itself overwhelmed by minions and unable to take control over the battlefield. Sacrificing any role is tough in a small team, so the way around this problem is to pick classes with strong secondary roles.

The barbarian, for example, is a striker, but it can also fill in as a defender or leader. An invoker is a controller, but the preserving build offers a few leaderlike prayers. See the following table for secondary roles.

Example: Short on players, Tom, Bob, and Joe sit down to create their party. Tom wants to play a leader and Bob's interested in a striker. Joe opts for a defender. Since the group lacks a controller, Bob decides to play a sorcerer. To help Bob's character, Tom chooses the shaman, which has some striker elements. Finally, Joe chooses a paladin so he can fill in as a leader if need be. So the party consists of Tom's panther shaman, Bob's chaos sorcerer, and Joe's protecting paladin.

Class	Role	Secondary Role
Avenger	Striker	Controller
Barbarian	Striker	Defender or Leader
Bard	Leader	Controller
Cleric	Leader	Defender
Druid	Controller	Leader or Striker
Fighter	Defender	Striker
Invoker	Controller	Leader or Striker
Paladin	Defender	Leader
Ranger	Striker	Defender
Rogue	Striker	Controller
Shaman	Leader	Defender or Striker
Sorcerer	Striker	Controller
Swordmage	Defender	Striker
Warden	Defender	Controller or Striker
Warlock	Striker	Controller
Wizard	Controller	Striker

Large Groups

Large groups can cover each role, but it's not always clear which roles should apply to the sixth, seventh, or eighth characters. Since encounters swell with party size, the result is usually extra enemies to face on the battlefield. So a group with only one defender is less likely to stop a flood of foes, one controller might not be enough to contain a slew of minions or manage the battlefield, and a striker can't deal enough damage to keep the enemy in check.

One way to look at building a party for a large group is to split the team into two groups. For a group of six, split the party into two groups of three. For seven players, divide into one group of four and one group of three. For eight players, split it into one group of five and one group of three. Build each group separately, but be sure to cover each role at least once between both groups. Use secondary roles to cover those roles that have less representation within the group.

Example: Everyone shows up to make characters and, to the DM's dismay, there are seven players. Being veterans, the group sits down to build their party. Splitting into two groups, one of four and the other of three, the larger group fills out the four roles and the smaller group decides on a controller, leader, and defender. Since the whole group is a bit low on strikers, one player chooses the predator druid for his controller, while another player selects the control wizard to make sure the group has at least one strong controller. For defenders, one player opts for the great weapon fighter and the other chooses the earth warden. An inspiring warlord, trickster rogue, and cunning bard round out the rest of the group.

The Role of Race

Settling on the group dynamic, what class each player wants to play, the players then generate their characters. A close look at the race and class combinations reveals opportunities and challenges for strong party-building tactics.

Any race can be any class, but even a cursory look at the racial information reveals some classes are better suited for specific races and vice versa. While you could play a gnome fighter, a human fighter would be more effective, and a goliath fighter would be even more effective still. Unless you want the challenge of playing against type and all the disadvantages doing so entails, your race and class combination is the most important decision you will make.

To simplify the process, you can determine how well a race functions with a class by comparing the ability scores the race boosts to those ability scores needed for the class. What a class needs in terms of ability scores falls into two types: A-shaped and V-shaped. An A-shaped class needs one high primary score and at least a good score in one of the two secondary scores. Examples of an A-shaped class would be the avenger, barbarian, fighter, and wizard.

A V-shaped class has two primary abilities and usually one secondary ability. When building a character, you really need only one or the other ability, but having both gives you the broadest range of powers the class can offer. Examples of V-shaped classes include the cleric, paladin, ranger, and warlock.

Other ability scores are important, but they are not as vital as primary and secondary scores. So, the way a race's ability score bonuses line up with the class's primary and secondary ability scores is the clearest indication of a strong combination. Building against type requires the character to invest expensive scores in the primary abilities, thus diminishing the character in other areas. Even with a strong race-class combination, you might overly specialize, such as a goliath fighter with a 20 Strength, and thus leave your other abilities to suffer, but typically, the most effective characters have a high primary ability, good secondary ability, and balanced abilities to keep their defenses at workable levels.

To simplify the process of determining which races are appropriate for which classes, you can divide all possible combinations into four categories: Optimal, Advantaged, Standard, and Disadvantaged.

An optimized combination means the race provides a boost to the class's primary and secondary abilities. An advantaged combination indicates the race provides a boost to the class's primary ability, but not to its secondary ability. A standard combination means the race provides a boost to the class's secondary ability, but not its primary ability. Finally, a disadvantaged combination means the ability score boosts apply to a tertiary score or none of the abilities most important to the class.

Race	Classes
Deva	
Optimal	Avenger, Invoker, Shaman, Wizard
Advantaged	Cleric, Druid, Swordmage
Standard	Bard, Fighter, Paladin, Ranger, Warden, Warlock, Warlord
Disadvantaged	Barbarian, Rogue, Sorcerer
Dragonborn	
Optimal	Barbarian, Paladin, Sorcerer, Warlord
Advantaged	Bard, Fighter, Ranger, Warden, Warlock
Standard	Cleric, Rogue, Swordmage
Disadvantaged	Avenger, Druid, Invoker, Shaman, Wizard
Drow	
Optimal	Rogue, Sorcerer
Advantaged	Bard, Paladin, Ranger, Warlock
Standard	Avenger, Barbarian, Cleric, Druid, Fighter, Warlord, Wizard
Disadvantaged	Invoker, Shaman, Swordmage, Warden
Dwarf	
Optimal	Druid, Invoker, Shaman
Advantaged	Avenger, Cleric, Warlock
Standard	Barbarian, Bard, Fighter, Paladin, Ranger, Swordmage, Warden, Wizard
Disadvantaged	Rogue, Sorcerer, Warlord
Eladrin	
Optimal	Wizard
Advantaged	Ranger, Rogue, Swordmage
Standard	Avenger, Bard, Druid, Fighter, Invoker, Shaman, Sorcerer, Warlock, Warlord
Disadvantaged	Barbarian, Cleric, Paladin, Warden (any)
Elf	
Optimal	Avenger, Druid
Advantaged	Cleric, Invoker, Ranger, Rogue, Shaman
Standard	Fighter, Paladin, Sorcerer, Warden, Wizard
Disadvantaged	Barbarian, Bard, Swordmage, Warlock, Warlord
Genasi	
Optimal	Swordmage, Warlord
Advantaged	Barbarian, Cleric, Fighter, Paladin, Ranger, Warden, Wizard
Standard	Avenger, Bard, Invoker, Rogue, Shaman, Sorcerer, Warlock
Disadvantaged	Druid
Goliath	
Optimal	Barbarian, Fighter, Warden
Advantaged	Cleric, Paladin, Ranger, Warlock, Warlord
Standard	Bard, Druid, Invoker, Rogue, Shaman, Sorcerer, Swordmage
Disadvantaged	Avenger, Wizard

The table here identifies the various race and class combinations and their categories for all the current races and classes available in the game. Some race-class combos might actually perform quite well even though they are in advantaged or standard categories. Take the classic dwarf fighter. Although his racial boosts to ability scores bump Constitution and Wisdom—secondary and tertiary fighter scores—the Dwarven Weapon Training feat grants access to superior axes and hammers and jumps up the damage. Add to this the dwarf's immovability, and you get a powerful great weapon or battlerager fighter who can hold a line and rip through enemies to great effect. So, use the table as a starting point and a way to help you frame a character concept in a strong and effective manner, but remember to look for exceptions.

Playing Against Type

Distilling a class choice down to its mechanical advantages is admittedly soulless. If you're only looking for optimization, you're bound to miss some of the most interesting character concepts. While an eladrin cleric might not be as effective as a dwarven cleric, it can be just as much fun to play and roleplay. It's from these unusual combinations some of the most memorable characters are born, and you should never dismiss an interesting combination just because it's harder to pull off mechanically.

Party Themes

The final consideration for building your adventuring group is to think about its theme. The theme might describe the general character, a common tactic, or some element to unify the group. Picking a theme isn't necessary, but doing so helps the group respond best in battle and also helps to make good decisions about the party composition.

Gnoll		
	Optimal	**–**
	Advantaged	**Ranger, Rogue, Warlock**
	Standard	**Avenger, Barbarian, Bard, Druid, Fighter, Invoker, Shaman, Sorcerer, Swordmage, Warden, Wizard**
	Disadvantaged	**Cleric, Paladin, Warlord**
Gnome		
	Optimal	**Bard, Warlock**
	Advantaged	**Paladin, Sorcerer, Swordmage, Wizard**
	Standard	**Avenger, Barbarian, Cleric, Invoker, Rogue, Shaman, Warlord**
	Disadvantaged	**Druid, Fighter, Ranger, Warden**
Half-Elf		
	Optimal	**Bard**
	Advantaged	**Paladin, Sorcerer, Warlock**
	Standard	**Barbarian, Cleric, Druid, Fighter, Invoker, Rogue, Shaman, Swordmage, Warden, Warlord**
	Disadvantaged	**Avenger, Ranger, Wizard**
Half-Orc		
	Optimal	**Fighter, Ranger, Rogue**
	Advantaged	**Barbarian, Cleric, Paladin, Warden, Warlord**
	Standard	**Avenger, Druid, Sorcerer, Swordmage, Wizard**
	Disadvantaged	**Bard, Invoker, Shaman, Warlock**
Halfling		
	Optimal	**Rogue, Sorcerer**
	Advantaged	**Bard, Paladin, Ranger, Warlock**
	Standard	**Avenger, Barbarian, Cleric, Druid, Fighter, Warlord, Wizard**
	Disadvantaged	**Invoker, Shaman, Swordmage, Warden**
Human		
	Advantaged	**Any**
Minotaur		
	Optimal	**Barbarian, Fighter, Warden**
	Advantaged	**Cleric, Paladin, Ranger, Warlock, Warlord**
	Standard	**Bard, Druid, Invoker, Rogue, Shaman, Sorcerer, Swordmage**
	Disadvantaged	**Avenger, Wizard**
Longtooth Shifter		
	Optimal	**Cleric, Warden**
	Advantaged	**Avenger, Barbarian, Druid, Fighter, Invoker, Paladin, Ranger, Shaman, Warlord**
	Standard	**Rogue, Sorcerer, Swordmage, Wizard**
	Disadvantaged	**Bard, Warlock**

Classic

Controller, Defender, Leader, Striker, Striker

The classic party is probably the most balanced. With one of each role represented, the group can fill the extra slot with an extra striker. One becomes the melee striker, working with the defender to take down enemies, while the other functions as a ranged striker, picking off enemies from afar.

Sample Party: Cleric, fighter, ranger, rogue, wizard

Battle Management

Controller, Controller, Defender, Leader, Striker

The control party emphasizes battlefield dominance, restricting enemy actions, herding foes into masses, and then wiping them off the map. While the two controllers establish the tone, they need heavy hitters up front to keep the occasional enemy from reaching them. Aside from the defender, a tough leader or melee striker can add extra insurance.

Sample Party: Bard, druid, swordmage, ranger, wizard

Tanking

Controller, Defender, Defender, Leader, Striker

Placing all the emphasis on containment, a tanking party puts up two heavy defenders in the front ranks with the support of a leader with a strong emphasis on defender as a secondary role. Since the party tends to operate in tighter formations, a controller and ranged striker can work behind the front ranks and pick off skirmishers, lurkers, and artillery without fear of reprisals.

Sample Party: Druid, fighter, warden, warlord, warlock

Razorclaw Shifter	
Optimal	**Avenger, Druid**
Advantaged	**Cleric, Invoker, Ranger, Rogue, Shaman**
Standard	**Fighter, Paladin, Sorcerer, Warden, Wizard**
Disadvantaged	**Barbarian, Bard, Swordmage, Warlock, Warlord**
Tiefling	
Optimal	**Bard, Warlock**
Advantaged	**Paladin, Sorcerer, Swordmage, Wizard**
Standard	**Avenger, Barbarian, Cleric, Invoker, Rogue, Shaman, Warlord**
Disadvantaged	**Druid, Fighter, Ranger, Warden**
Warforged	
Optimal	**Barbarian, Fighter, Warden**
Advantaged	**Cleric, Paladin, Ranger, Warlock, Warlord**
Standard	**Bard, Druid, Invoker, Rogue, Shaman, Sorcerer, Swordmage**
Disadvantaged	**Avenger, Wizard**

Living Fortress

Controller, Defender, Leader, Leader, Striker

A resilient party uses attrition to defeat their enemies. Since they can regain hit points easily or at least accumulate temporary hit points at a rapid rate, they can outstrip the amount of damage their enemies deal and outlast their foe. Doubling up on leaders and supporting them with classes that have leader as their secondary roles gives the party an almost unlimited reserve of resources.

Sample Party: Avenger, cleric, paladin, invoker, warlord

Raining Death

Controller, Defender, Striker, Striker, Striker

A risky composition to be sure, this group invests in two ranged strikers and one controller, leaving it up to a tough defender and a melee striker to keep the enemies at bay. Without the leader, the group has a glass jaw, but with a protecting paladin and preserving invoker, the group can beat the enemy down before they close, giving themselves a fighting chance when the battle switches to melee.

Sample Party: Barbarian, paladin, sorcerer, warlock, wizard

Shock and Awe

Defender, Leader, Striker, Striker, Striker

Rather than hit enemies from afar, a shock-and-awe party engages quickly, smashing through their enemy ranks and delivering staggering amounts of damage. Since the party closes, a controller will likely have a tough time using his bursts and blasts, so it's best to invest in another striker to keep damage output high.

Sample Party: Barbarian, cleric, fighter, ranger, rogue

Power Source Themes

You can also build parties along power source themes, so each member would have classes from the same power source. An arcane party is a bit disadvantaged in defending, but they do have impressive artillery support.

A divine party has hit points in abundance, but their ranged attacks suffer, placing the burden on the invoker's shoulders to deal with artillery.

Martial parties dispense with the controller and either pick up an extra fighter—a tempest fighter or battlerager fighter are good—or another warlord. The rogue and the ranger are versatile enough to handle melee and ranged combat, giving the group a wide range of tactics.

Finally, a primal party is all about dealing damage. With a predator druid working alongside a rageblood barbarian, there's little to stop this powerful group. The shaman can increase the party's numbers with his spirits, either to attack from afar or to boost allies' attacks.

Sample Arcane Party: Bard, sorcerer, swordmage, warlock, wizard

Sample Divine Party: Avenger, avenger, cleric, invoker, paladin

Sample Martial Party: Fighter, fighter, ranger, rogue, warlord

Sample Primal Party: Barbarian, druid, druid, shaman, warden

Racial Theme

Perhaps the most challenging theme is the racial party. In this theme, each party member has the same race. While an interesting experiment, and sometimes successful, certain roles are considerably weaker than they might be in an otherwise mixed party. For example, an all-eladrin party is good in control (wizard), solid in striking (archer rangers and rogues), and can even field a good defender (swordmage), but its leaders are weak by comparison.

When assembling a single-race group, work carefully with the other players and review the advice throughout this article to ensure your group makes up for its weaknesses. A specialized character built against type might surprise you and make for a fun and interesting character. Even if the character is a bit on the weaker side, your group can pitch in with multiclass feats or choosing classes with secondary roles to make up for the disadvantaged character. And if you find it's just not worth taking on a disadvantaged role, you have plenty of ways to fill the gap.

Final Thoughts

When you pool your resources and place the party's interests over your personal inclinations, you can create a more effective, streamlined, and deadly team. A party filled with optimized characters works well together and can devise devastating strategies to handle just about any challenge they come across. While an optimized party might be successful, it works only if everyone around the table has the same interest in this approach. If a player really wants to build a character that doesn't fit within the party model, don't worry about it. The point of this game is to have fun. Just because you don't have the perfect balance of characters and roles doesn't mean you can't survive combats, navigate skill challenges, and, above all, have a good time. In fact, it's the narrow victories and the close calls you remember most.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb contributed design to such books as the *Forgotten Realms® Player's Guide, Draconomicon I: Chromatic Dragons, Manual of the Planes, P2: Demon Queen's Enclave, Martial Power, Player's Handbook 2, Eberron® Campaign Guide, Eberron Player's Guide, Divine Power, Adventurer's Vault 2, Draconomicon 2: Metallic Dragons, Primal Power,* as well as numerous articles for *D&D Insider.* Robert lives in Tennessee.

Codex of Betrayal:
Alloces, the Butcher of Nessus

by Ari Marmell
Illustrations by Hector Ortiz

"Long and long did the angel, whom mortals call Tavlaniel, linger in the blood-iron chains and the carven stone walls of the cell into which, upon his capture, he had been unceremoniously thrust. Long did he cry out to rejoin his side as they battled the betrayers across the length and breadth of Heaven, his heart and soul aching to stand at their side. And long did he weep, that heart and that soul broken beyond mortal imagining, as he felt the murder of [He Who Was] shake the firmament, felt the life of a god, his god, slip swiftly, impossibly away from the world it had once so brightly illuminated.

And still did Tavlaniel wait, in darkness broken only by the feeble light of his own inner fires, in silence broken only by the wails and sobs of his mourning, until he was certain that the betrayers and the usurpers must have forgotten him entirely.

Until the day the bronze door to the cell abruptly opened on screaming hinges, to admit the flickering firelight of a Hell that had not been born when the angel was first imprisoned. And in that flame stood the shape of Alloces, of whom Tavlaniel had heard even so long ago. And then did the angel know that, even for an immortal, fate could offer far worse than imprisonment eternal.

—From Chapter 2, verse 17, of "A Chronicle of Unquenchable Flames and Unbreakable Maledictions," being the third part of the *Codex of Betrayal*.

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So great is the reputation of devils for scheming and for deceit, it is easy for mortals to forget that Hell is not merely a place of treachery and backstabbing, but of unspeakable torments and of horrors. Through deals with mortals and pacts with gods, through honeyed lies and grasping claws, through crime and cruelty and sacrifice, Asmodeus's Hell claims a portion of the souls of dying mortals, damned either by their ties to devils, or through the machinations of devils and their servants. To the devils, these souls are all the same—clay to be sculpted . . . even as it screams.

At the heart of Hell's greatest tortures, his name still whispered in vicious awe by devils who can never hope to match his sheer depravity, stands Alloces. Called the Butcher of Nessus by some, the Prince of Beasts and the Father of Monsters by others, Alloces boasts a fascination with life—with the flesh and the soul—that has driven him since before the embers of rebellion first stirred in Asmodeus's black heart. Discontent with merely inflicting horrors, Alloces has turned his obsession to creating them. He twists, sculpts, shapes, and breeds creatures to make even other devils cringe. Today he serves as kennel-master to the lords of Hell, a position that renders him valuable to all and beholden to none. And if his ambitions in the hierarchy of Hell are modest, his need for souls, and his lust for inflicting eternal pain on those whom he would shape into immortal nightmares makes him no less of a threat to the innocent folk of the mortal realm.

History

A potent but relatively unimportant angel in the ranks of He Who Was, Alloces had a penchant for violence and cruelty from the beginning—one imbued into his very nature, one encouraged even by his divine master, and one that would lead to his infamous place among the usurping hordes of Asmodeus.

Before the Uprising

Alloces, like most early devils, was once an angel—a servant of the divine. The precise form he took is unclear; scholars debate as to whether he was an angel of vengeance, an angel of wrath, or some other sort of entity. Even the *Codex of Betrayal* is imprecise, for while it refers to Alloces as an angel of wrath, it uses that term for a wide variety of angelic soldiers that modern sages categorize as different sorts.

Whatever his specific nature might have been, Alloces's general persona is clear enough. He was a punishing warrior of He Who Was. Alloces was an angel directed to inflict great suffering upon mortals who acted against the god's worshipers, defaced his shrines, or otherwise drew his divine ire.

In this, Alloces was far from unique; vengeance and punishment are the bailiwick of many angels. Powerful entities inflicted suffering and death with a cold efficiency. But here, Alloces proved different. In his immortal heart, a terrible lust began to grow. To Alloces, the crimes of his target ceased to matter, and the line between the guilty and the innocent wavered and faded away. The pain and the suffering were an end unto themselves, not merely a means of discipline.

His punishments and kills grew ever more elaborate, ever crueler, until even other angels grew uneasy with his fondness for agony and began to shun his company. Legends claim that several angels approached him, requesting he rein in his bloody impulses and accusing him of violating the precepts of He Who Was.

Those particular angels are conspicuously absent from the lists of all who participated in the war to come. It might be that Alloces was the first angel to slay another angelic servant of his own god, though such a claim would be hard to prove.

During the War

Alloces was not among the angels who initially rose up alongside Asmodeus, for none had approached him to join in the growing conspiracy. Although his sadism and bloodlust were widely infamous, none of the betrayers were certain how deeply his loyalty to He Who Was might run. A number of the treasonous host believed that, though he might take his duties to extremes, Alloces still believed in the righteousness of his cause and his divine lord.

And indeed, although Alloces no longer felt any particular devotion to He Who Was, neither did he initially feel any call to join the ranks of Asmodeus's betrayers. During the earliest days of the war, he fought alongside the besieged god, his sword spilling angelic blood across the heavenly clouds.

That all changed at the end of the infamous Battle of Blood-Dimmed Stars, wherein Alloces and his allies captured one of Asmodeus's officers alive. The name of this rebel angel goes unrecorded, for he was executed almost immediately upon his capture—despite the impassioned arguments of Alloces to keep the traitor alive. In part, Alloces sought to slake his sadistic bloodlust on the captive, of that there can be no doubt, but he also argued that great secrets and strategies could be extracted from the enemy, given the proper "persuasion." When the other angels refused, admonishing him that such actions were contemptible and inappropriate for servants of He Who Was, Alloces came to two solid conclusions. One, though it might take time, the forces of Asmodeus would assuredly prove victorious, for their foes lacked the stomach to do what was necessary to win. And two, his own particular skills—and proclivities—would be far more welcome among the usurpers than they were here.

When Alloces approached Asmodeus with the heads of the angels who had slain his officer, offering to take the fallen one's place, the soon-to-be King of Hell readily assented.

Technically, Alloces was made answerable to the archangel Geryon, one of Asmodeus's most potent generals. And indeed, in many military endeavors, Alloces fought alongside other rebel angels, commanded or commanding as the ranks of the others dictated.

But this was not where Alloces's best use lay, and both he and Geryon knew it. The general quickly assigned Alloces a position as his chief inquisitor, allowing the sadistic angel all the opportunity he could ever desire to wreak unimaginable suffering on captured enemies. The intelligence thus gained, although indeed substantial, was secondary to the damage that tales of his depravities inflicted upon the morale of the angels of He Who Was. Never had they heard of such horrors, let alone believed themselves susceptible to such things. More than one enemy contingent turned and fled upon hearing the merest rumor that Alloces was present and waiting to take all survivors into his tender care. Eventually, Alloces was reassigned to Asmodeus's own contingent, becoming one of the great devil's team of chief interrogators.

Even as his efforts drew the attention of military leaders on both sides, Alloces's own interests and obsessions began to shift, growing more repulsive. In his constant infliction of tortures, Alloces became fascinated with the nature of life and with the malleability and resiliency of flesh. He began experimenting on and even vivisecting captive angels, trying to determine the precise moment that life left the body, the limits of endurance, and the ability of the physical form to function with limbs removed, reshaped, or even replaced. As his obsession grew, Alloces became less focused on gathering intelligence and more on the results of his "studies." By the time the war ended and Asmodeus threw down the broken form of He Who Was, Alloces's star was on the wane, and his effectiveness was questioned by superiors and subordinates alike.

The Infernal Kingdom

The curse of vengeance that reshaped the dominion into the Nine Hells of today, and confined the devils to the realm they'd fought so hard to conquer, didn't initially discomfit Alloces as it did so many others. His ambitions didn't run to ruling, or to exploring and corrupting other worlds, but to continuing his studies and experiments. The forces of Asmodeus still held several angels captive—prisoners who had remained loyal to He Who Was—and since they served no greater purpose any longer, many were given over into the care of various interrogators. When such prisoners weren't available, Alloces acquired a number of devils on whom he could "operate" by hiring himself out to competing dukes and princes, promising to acquire information from captive rivals in exchange for ownership of the broken remains. Geryon, Mephistopheles, and Asmodeus made frequent use of his talents, but the interrogator and mad surgeon worked at various points for most of the major devils of Hell. During this time Alloces created some of his earliest and most primitive monsters, through the careful recombination of parts and pieces of various angels, devils, and other astral beasts. On occasion, a powerful devil employed Alloces not as an interrogator, but as a breeder, to build a specific sort of horror or to shepherd and increase the size of herds of hellish beasts.

Still, despite such powerful connections, Alloces's narrow range of interests might have kept him from ever achieving further importance among the armies of devils, had it not been for the sudden influx of mortal souls.

Torment Eternal

For many devils, and of course for Asmodeus, the realization that mortal souls could be funneled into the Hells after death, by using deceptive pacts and horrific ceremonies, was incredibly enticing. Not only were such souls viable sources of dark power and possible servants, but people could be tempted into summoning devils to the mortal realm, granting them at least temporary freedom from their cursed imprisonment.

For Alloces, this discovery meant something entirely different. It meant he had an entirely new population on which to experiment, and entirely new metaphysical discoveries to make.

From his fascination with the flesh, Alloces's obsession grew to incorporate the soul, a concept with which he was previously unfamiliar. Through magic rituals and careful vivisection, he studied the precise relationship between body and soul, as well as the differences between the souls of mortal beings and the spiritual essence of immortals and animalistic beasts. He traded and served with other devils for his share of souls, plus he worked to tempt and corrupt mortals where the opportunities arose—not for the boost in power or position, but to acquire a larger supply of raw materials.

Monster Cults

As mortal societies grew ever more aware of the new power in the heavens, diabolic cults arose throughout countless communities and cultures. Most were meant to empower their members (or at least its leaders) by using infernal pacts, and it quickly became obvious that the more powerful devils were—unsurprisingly—developing the strongest, most effective cults. Some lesser devils made do with the dregs and attempted to deceive mortals into thinking them greater than they were, or—like Beleth, the so-called Witch's Viscount (*Dragon* 365)—focused on smaller, more primitive sects that had so far remained largely unnoticed by the archdevils. Alloces, however, chose a different route.

Taking advantage of his growing skill at creating horrors, Alloces unleashed a variety of new monsters

on the mortal realm and claimed credit for creating others with which he had nothing to do. (To this day, Alloces claims to have created, among others, the nightmare, the chimera, and the manticore; to have bred the first cambions; and even to have infected the first lycanthropes. Few sages, wizards, or religious leaders believe these claims, but nevertheless, his mortal servitors continue to spread such rumors.) He also instructed several mortals in the animation of dead flesh; although the prior claims are considered patently false, Alloces *is* credited with inspiring the creation of the first flesh golem.

Ultimately, regardless of how much is truth and how much is deception, Alloces became strongly associated in occult circles with a wide variety of the stranger, more horrific beasts of the mortal world. In many primitive cultures, such monsters were (and in some savage regions, still are) feared and even revered as embodying the wrath of the gods. These beliefs evolved into "monster cults," which are sects of people who worship the monsters themselves, or at least the powers behind them, seeing such beasts as the most potent creatures in the region and thus worthy of reverence. Many modern mages seek to create monsters of their own—from golems to living hybrids—and many of these depraved "sages" are also tied to such beast cults. In both cases, the power behind such peculiar sects is Alloces, who continues to reveal secrets of reanimating flesh to his followers to keep their loyalties—and eventually acquire their souls.

The Prince of Beasts

From a skilled but unreliable interrogator and a fiend of great renown but little influence, Alloces has grown into one of the most feared devils below the ranks of the archdevils and dukes themselves. Alloces has turned his obsession into a tool for all the Hells. For years, he served as a combination kennel-master and huntmaster for Geryon, keeping that archdevil's menagerie of beasts and horrors, creating and breeding further monsters at his master's request. As Geryon's own influence began to fade, Alloces abandoned him, instead offering his services to all who could pay his asking price in souls, in magic, or in political favors. Today, he keeps herds of nightmares, dragons, golems, and melded souls (see "The Brood of Alloces," page 46) on behalf of Bel, Fierna, Glasya, Mephistopheles, and Asmodeus, as well as a vast array of lesser devils.

When not dealing with his clients or looking in on his mortal cults, Alloces continues to engage in his only love and his only obsession: the torture and disfigurement of souls into monsters.

Alloces's Goals

Unlike most other devils, Alloces has no interest in power for power's sake. He cares little for the actions of other devils, save where they impact him directly, and is content ruling over a single (albeit enormous) estate at the edge of Asmodeus's domain of Nessus.

He doesn't want to rule; he doesn't want to dominate. He wants only to be allowed to continue his "great work," and to ensure himself an unending supply of raw materials. In some ways, this makes him *worse*.

Unlike other devils, who split their attentions and their schemes between mortals and other devils, Alloces has the luxury of a narrower focus. Because his interaction with other hellish denizens is limited largely to agreements to create, breed, and house various horrors, he can devote all his efforts to the acquisition of ever greater numbers of souls—and to the creation of ever greater horrors, their component parts screaming in eternal agony even as they work to slaughter new victims.

The Mortal World

Alloces is not in a strong position when it comes to acquiring mortal souls. He lacks the power and name recognition of Hell's greatest archdevils, to whom most diabolic cults are devoted. Similarly, he lacks the broad appeal or temptation of lesser devils such as succubi or the numerous imps of Beleth. Alloces, therefore, concentrates his efforts on specific populations, where he feels his mastery over beasts and his ability to shape the bodies and souls of mortals can best serve him. From these cults and cabals he earns many of his souls—the others coming as trade or payment from other devils—so Alloces works as tirelessly in the mortal realm as any devil, despite his preference for focusing on his experimental endeavors.

Plague and Deformity

Alloces has found that one of his most frequently opened doorways into the mortal realm comes in the aftermath of widespread disease. Plague leaves a trail of broken, twisted bodies behind it—the dying and the deformed who have already passed beyond the bounds of natural healing. Many plague-stricken communities lack any means of magical healing, and even people who can acquire them are often too weak to survive the potential hardships of rituals such as Cure Disease.

But Alloces's name is associated with all manner of occult rites involving the flesh, and a power capable of twisting limbs into inhuman shapes can surely repair them with equal faculty. By bestowing a semblance of his powers on his own diabolic and mortal servitors, or even appearing himself when the proper rites are invoked, Alloces restores life and health to the broken wreckage of plague—but never, of course, without cost. More often than not, the souls Alloces gains in exchange for these efforts are not those of the victims themselves, but their loved ones, for what loving parents or devoted spouse wouldn't at least

consider selling his or her soul, when faced with the thought of children or a lover dying in horrid agony, or spending an entire life in crippled want? Although some instances of plague (or other disasters) lead to only one or two souls, some severely ravaged towns have turned themselves over to Alloces almost in their entirety. Some of these birth new cults, while others utterly end at the current generation, all lives and souls stripped away to feed the Butcher's unslaked obsessions.

On occasion, servants of Alloces have been known to spread plague deliberately—contaminating water sources, performing rituals, or even collaborating with creatures such as scourge dragons or demonic sects—to create new opportunities for their diabolic master to make his deals.

Vivisectionists and Wizards

Although the bulk of Alloces's mortal worshipers come from the ranks of the simple or the savage—either plague-stricken communities as discussed above, or primitive beast cults as discussed below—a significant minority, and indeed some of his most potent and most devoted followers, hail instead from the heights of the urbane and the educated. From the surgeon more concerned with his own skills than the well being of his patients, to the sage who seeks detailed knowledge of the inner workings of all living things, to the wealthy aristocrat who seeks to return her deceased husband to the land of the living no matter what the gods might have to say about it—all have two things in common. One, they feel that their wealth and privilege place them above the ethical concerns of "lesser folk," and two, they are ripe fruit waiting for Alloces to pluck them down.

Although such individuals are indeed rare, they represent the beating heart of Alloces's efforts on the mortal plane. It was by using just such deluded fools that he taught humanity the secret of crafting flesh golems and introduced various dark rituals intended to transform a living victim into an animal. Mortals who follow in the footsteps of Alloces's own obsessions provide access to wealth and authority, and even to the poorer souls of the cities, that the devil would otherwise lack. Where beast cults of Alloces are unsubtle, nearly as wild as demonic sects, these villains hide themselves away in the hierarchy of local governments or high society, drawing more and more of the bored aristocracy into their sadistic and depraved endeavors.

Beast Cults

The most numerous of Alloces's worshipers are members, or descendants, of so-called beast cults. As mentioned previously, these sects worship the various monsters of the wilderness as emissaries of the gods, or the embodiments of divine wrath. Alloces, with his own association with various monsters, has corrupted such beliefs into worship of himself.

These beliefs appear primarily in more primitive regions, so many of Alloces's worshipers are tribal, and they hail from races such as shifters, lizardfolk, and goliaths. That said, some modern towns house such cults as well, either because of the return of old superstitions—perhaps during an upsurge in lycanthropy, for instance—or because the townsfolk are descendants of more primitive beast cults who have maintained their beliefs even as the world around them grew and changed.

Members of urban beast cults keep themselves secret, performing rites, sacrifices, and experiments covertly, while going about their daily lives in the guise of normal folk. In primitive, savage regions,

however, these cults are overt and vicious, performing open blood ceremonies, raiding nearby tribes, and acting more like worshipers of demons than like the followers of a diabolic power.

The Hierarchy of the Nine Hells

Alloces doesn't hold a typical position in Hell's hierarchy. On a personal level, and in terms of the favors and influence he can call upon, he's roughly the equivalent to a lesser duke or more powerful baron—nowhere near the strength of the true archdevils, but a force to be reckoned with.

But Alloces doesn't govern a great city or a massive principality within Hell's nine domains. He oversees a single grand estate—thousands of acres in size, yes, but still negligible compared to the domains of other ranking devils—at the edge of Nessus. Here, fences of black iron and hellfire keep rampaging herds of monsters in line; here, in his great stone manor, Alloces maintains a dozen laboratories, and well over a hundred stables.

Alloces's interaction with other devils, except for those over whom he rules on his estate, comes in the form of arrangements to breed, house, train, and produce monsters for use as mounts, hunting hounds, weapons of war, and beasts of burden. In this relationship Alloces maintains his one sacrosanct rule; he never sabotages, delays, or otherwise interferes with one devil's beasts at the behest of another, no matter how great the payment offered. Although Alloces's claims of creating such monsters are likely untrue, there is no doubt that he has bred new, more potent versions of nightmares, chimeras (with the heads of battle dragons; see *Draconomicon: Chromatic Dragons*, page 189), and hellstinger scorpions. He maintains herds of Nessian hounds and melded souls (see "The Brood of Alloces," pages 46 and 50), and holds auctions to provide his newest creations to whichever devil offers the most raw souls in payment. Entering Alloces's estate is like walking into an enormous ranch—one on which the animals all want very much to kill you, and on which being caught trespassing might result in your soul being added to the herd.

On occasion, a devil still comes to Alloces for his expertise in torture and interrogation, but this is a rare event indeed. Most devils have their own methods of questioning, after all, and how many of them want a potential rival like Alloces to know what information they seek?

Sample Cult: The Carnate Cabal

Based within the town of Ensmere, the so-called Carnate Cabal is a secret within a secret—a dual-layered cult of Alloces in which not even the bulk of the membership understand the true nature, the depth, or the depravity of their sect.

The cult was born in a nearby village founded by pioneers descended from a beast-worshiping tribe. For years, their depravities were blatant and open, but when Ensmere sprang up nearby, the cultists hid their practices, lest the larger community turn on them. When Ensmere annexed the village, during an expansion brought about by the prosperity of the Empire of Nerath, the cult went even farther underground. It shrank dramatically, so much so that it was in danger of dying out entirely.

Until, that is, the appearance of Lord Illisar Hallifrey, last heir of the Hallifrey line and sole master of their property, the monolithic Asterfield Estate.

In his public persona, Illisar is a typical aristocratic fop, simpering and sycophantic to his betters, coldly disdainful to everyone else, and concerned only with gossip and fashion and those elements of the marketplace that might impact his own wealth and status.

But privately, Illisar leads a cabal of the rich, the educated, and the utterly unscrupulous. He holds an intense fascination with vivisection and with determining the connections between the soul and the flesh. Bored with traditional entertainments and even occult dabbling, he and his friends began experimenting on the poor and homeless off the street. Combining his proclivities with his occult knowledge, it can be no wonder that Illisar swiftly communed with servants of the hideous Alloces, who in turn directed Illisar to his other local, diminishing cult.

With access to Illisar's money, estate, and political connections, the cult experienced a sudden resurgence. Today, the beast cult—the majority of the sect—spends its time engaged in prayers to Alloces and rites that venerate the strength and viciousness of various monsters of the wild. The bulk of their practices are, though depraved, essentially harmless—except on those rare occasions wherein they kidnap someone off the streets for sacrifice, to propitiate the world's monsters and Alloces, so that the beasts of the region might remain appeased.

Those victims, however, might wish that they'd merely been sacrificed. For they, in turn, are handed over to the Carnate Cabal—a name that properly refers only to Illisar's circle, not the cult entire—for experiments as depraved as any mortal mind can concoct. From golems to cross-species transplants, Illisar and his allies do all in their power to follow in the footsteps of Alloces. And from his place in Hell, the devil looks upon them and smiles, for he knows that each soul guilty of such horrors will be subject to his own experiments in turn. . .

Alloces, the Butcher of Nessus

Prince of Beasts, father of monsters, mad surgeon of the Nine Hells, Alloces would prefer to send his own creations and servants into battle than to engage in it himself. Should the need arise, however, Alloces is a brutal combatant in his own right—but even then, he never enters battle without allies at his side.

Description

Although he stands among the more human-looking devils, Alloces is clearly something else, something wrong, upon casual inspection—yet it often requires a longer, closer look before any observer can pick up on exactly why. The Butcher of Nessus stands taller and thinner than the average human—just enough to stand out from a crowd. His hairless skin is hideously pale with just the faintest tint of life, like the flesh of a shaved cat left too long in the dark. The cast of his features have a touch of the predatory, as though the face of a great feline was pressing against the inside of his own, and his clenching, grasping fingers are abnormally long.

Whether he does so in deliberate mockery of human religion or dons the garb in which he feels most comfortable, Alloces wears a priest's cassock of jet black leather and heavy cloth that is so tight around the chest and shoulders that it looks as though it should tear asunder. The whispers of the cassock's skirt as he walks sound like the hissing of an angry beast.

Although it would be relatively easy for Alloces to pass himself off as a mortal, with magic or even mundane disguise, he rarely if ever does so. In his mad obsession, there is no "lesser being" for which Alloces would ever wish to be mistaken.

Alloces **Level 28 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium immortal humanoid (devil) XP 26,000

Initiative +22 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
Infernal Goad aura 10; allies within the aura can choose to take 10 damage to reroll a saving throw that just failed. Each failed saving throw can be rerolled in this manner only once.
Terrible Presence (**Psychic**) aura 3; enemies that start their turns within the aura or enter the aura take 15 psychic damage.
HP 518; **Bloodied** 259
AC 42; **Fortitude** 40, **Reflex** 42, **Will** 39
Immune polymorph; **Resist** 30 fire, 20 poison
Saving Throws +2
Speed 7, climb 7, teleport 5
Action Points 1

⊕ **Soulwood Staff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+33 vs. AC; 3d12 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 4 squares and slowed until the end of Alloces's next turn.

Soul-Rending Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Charm, Psychic**
Ranged 20; +32 vs. Will; 3d8 + 10 psychic damage, and the target makes an immediate basic attack against an ally within 6 squares of it as a free action.

Infernal Summons (standard; encounter)
Alloces summons a group of allies. Summoned allies roll initiative to determine when they act in the initiative order and gain a +4 bonus to attack rolls as long as Alloces is alive. They remain until they are killed, dismissed by Alloces (free action), or the encounter ends. PCs do not earn experience points for killing these summoned creatures. Alloces chooses to summon one of the following groups of allies:
✦ 1 seraphic golem (level 22 elite) and 2 infernal hounds (level 16), or
✦ 2 war devils (level 22) and 2 shrieking steeds (level 16), or
✦ 1 war devil (level 22), 5 legion devil legionnaires (level 21), and 2 infernal hounds (level 16)

Horrid Transformation (minor; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Charm, Polymorph**
Ranged 12; +32 vs. Fortitude; the target is dominated by Alloces (save ends). Alloces can have only one target dominated at a time.

Infernal Inspiration (minor 1/turn; at-will)
Ranged 12; an ally can shift 1 square and make a basic attack against a target within range.

Flesh-Twister (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Polymorph**
Area burst 2 within 20; +32 vs. Fortitude; the targets are weakened, slowed, and take ongoing 10 damage (save ends all).
Aftereffect: Target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Supernal; Alloces can communicate telepathically with any creature he created, within line of sight *or* within 20 squares without line of sight
Skills Bluff +27, Heal +24, Insight +24, Intimidate +27
Str 22 (+20) **Dex** 27 (+22) **Wis** 21 (+19)
Con 27 (+22) **Int** 30 (+24) **Cha** 27 (+22)

Alloces Tactics

Alloces has one particular tactic to which he defaults ahead of all others: overwhelm the foe with the weight of numbers. No matter how many allies he already has with him, he takes his first action to summon more by using *infernal summons*, unless he's fighting in an area where greater numbers are more hindrance than help. He remains at range, putting multiple layers of allies between himself and the foe. He uses *flesh twister* as soon as he can catch at least two or three foes with it. When dominating a foe, he prefers to spend his efforts on moving them into a poor tactical position, rather than having them waste actions making basic attacks against their allies.

Alloces has no compunctions whatsoever about fleeing if his life depends on it, or on sacrificing his allies to make sure he can do so successfully.

Alloces Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 19: The devil Alloces, called the Butcher of Nessus and the Prince of Beasts, is something of an animal breeder and kennel master to the Lords of Hell. In his estate in Nessus, he conducts horrid experiments on captured mortal souls, transforming them into foul beasts that suffer eternally even as they slaughter others.

DC 28: Although not as powerful in combat as other unique devils, Alloces possesses brutal powers of transmutation and deformation with which he can devastate his foes. Worse, Alloces is rarely without allies, and even if cornered alone he can summon allies instantly to his side.

DC 33: With this result, the PC knows all the basics as presented in the History section (although the DM is encouraged to omit a few specific details if they seem like the sort of thing that wouldn't become known to even expert mortal students of the occult).

Encounter Groups

As mentioned above, Alloces never fights alone. The encounter groups given here do *not* include any additional reinforcements the Butcher of Nessus might summon by using *infernal summons*.

Level 28 Encounter (XP 72,350)
The PCs have invaded Alloces's estate, perhaps hoping to catch the devil unawares. They haven't.
✦ Alloces (level 28 elite controller)
✦ 1 advanced war devil (level 26 brute)
✦ 1 advanced vile host (level 22 solo soldier)
✦ 2 seraphic golems (level 22 elite soldier)

Level 28 Encounter (XP 70,550)
Alloces is traveling across the plains of Nessus, on his way to meet with a potential client for his horrific services.
✦ Alloces (level 28 elite controller)
✦ Machalos (level 24 soldier)
✦ 2 shrieking steeds (level 16 skirmishers)
✦ 7 advanced infernal hounds (level 23 soldiers)

Enemies, Allies, and Minions

Alloces counts scores of devils, major and minor, as clients for his repulsive services and thus as potential contacts. Most, however, have no strong attachments to the Prince of Beasts, seeing him as a peculiar if frightening recluse who, except for his occasional dabbling in the mortal world and thus in the flow of souls to Hell, can be safely ignored when his services aren't required. Alloces has stronger ties with a few devils, however; these are discussed below.

Asmodeus

The King of Hell was the first to make use of Alloces's talents during the war of rebellion, and though those talents have shifted somewhat in direction and in scope during the ages since, Asmodeus still recognizes the lesser devil's usefulness. Alloces keeps entire herds of fiendish mounts and Nessian hounds on Asmodeus's behalf–the largest such herds and packs of any on his sprawling estate. Although Asmodeus doesn't consider Alloces one of his more important vassals, and Alloces knows well that his usefulness to the King of Hell is limited, Alloces still considers Asmodeus a potential ally and, as long as he doesn't abuse the privilege, is in a position to call upon the fiendish god for the occasional boon.

The Dukes of Hell

Although the Butcher of Nessus began his service under Geryon, Alloces severed ties with that devil shortly after shifting focus from interrogation to vivisection and the creation of foul life. And a good thing it was, since he might otherwise have been caught in Geryon's fall and banishment from Hell at the hands of Asmodeus.

Despite this fact, Geryon's successor, ice-bound Levistus, harbors a deep mistrust for Alloces, and is one of only two archdevils to never to make use of his services. The other is the sluglike Baalzebul, who seems quite capable of spawning his preferred sorts of monsters on his own, and is far too paranoid to truck with any devil so closely favored by Asmodeus.

On the other side of the equation, Alloces is considered a close ally—or at least employee—of the martial Bel, who frequently makes use of the Butcher's breeding programs to add new mounts and living weapons to his ever-growing army. Similarly, Glasya, daughter of Asmodeus and relatively new to her position of rulership over the domain of Malbolge, appreciates the benefits of having a devil she knows can be trusted watching over and breeding the herds of horrors that serve alongside her loyal soldiers.

In addition to these, Alloces also keeps herds or packs for Fierna and Mephistopheles (the latter of whom, through his mastery of hellfire, aided Alloces in the creation of the hellfire hounds [see "The Brood of Alloces," page 50]), but these interactions are, although relatively free of malice, purely business where the devils are concerned. Although they are clearly no enemies of Alloces, neither can he reliably count them as allies.

Lesser Devils

Alloces doesn't limit his interactions to the archdevils alone, of course. A number of pit fiends and war devils boast hideous mounts or hunting hounds

created in the Butcher's laboratories. He deals on a frequent basis with a devil named Stalos, a repulsive creature with whom he trades for the souls, and his interactions with Glasya have caused him to cross paths with Beleth. Glasya's spymaster has little to do with or say to Alloces, but has on occasion discussed techniques of interrogation with the Butcher of Nessus.

Alloces boasts a few personal servants and lieutenants, though most of his minions take other forms. These include the following:

• Kromastes (an elite ice devil, advanced to 24th level), the head of Alloces's household security.

• Machalos, a former servitor of Geryon now housed in a body of Alloces's creation (see below).

The Brood of Alloces

The bulk of Alloces's allies and servants are creatures and constructs of his own creation. These include, but are by no means limited to, the monsters detailed in the accompanying article "The Brood of Alloces" (page 45).

Machalos, the Sutured Fiend

Machalos might not be the most powerful of Alloces's servants, but he's absolutely the fiercest. Perhaps more peculiarly, he's also the most loyal—and yet might one day become the Butcher of Nessus's worst nightmare.

Description

Machalos is a patchwork creature—a diabolic essence in an artificial form. His general shape is that of the pit fiend he used to be, but with parts, patches, and limbs from a variety of creatures—including at least one type of angel and one of the larger varieties of troll. Although the edges of his "patches" are clearly stitched, like a cheap repair on a coat, the various limbs have been sculpted together like wax, as if the flesh was shaped as easily as soft clay.

Machalos's gestures are erratic, as though his body isn't quite willing to obey his commands, yet he moves more than smoothly enough when combat erupts. Machalos carries a war devil's trident rather than the traditional mace of the pit fiend; its tip is constantly wreathed in flame and smells of burning blood.

Machalos Tactics

Machalos is a more vicious combatant even than true pit fiends. He lunges into battle, making immediate use of *wild frenzy* to deal substantial damage. He normally waits a round or two before using his *back-breaker* attack, and he uses *inner renewal* the first round after he's bloodied. Machalos prefers to fight to the death, but he retreats from combat if Alloces orders him to do so.

Machalos Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 24: Machalos is a devilish construct—the essence of a pit fiend placed inside a piecemeal body. He is a loyal servant of the devil Alloces, who is also called the Butcher of Nessus.

DC 29: Machalos was once a pit fiend in the service of Geryon, Lord of Stygia, and it was during Alloces's service to that same archdevil that the two first met. When Geryon was thrown down by Asmodeus and replaced by Levistus, the new lord's operatives attacked and slew most of Geryon's generals, lest they plot against the newcomers. Machalos escaped the attack, but he was hideously injured

Machalos	**Level 24 Soldier**
Large immortal animate (devil)	XP 6,050

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
HP 228; **Bloodied** 114
AC 40; **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 35
Immune disease, sleep; **Resist** 20 fire, 20 poison
Speed 8, fly 8 (clumsy)

Hellish Trident (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
Reach 2; +31 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage and the target deals 5 fire damage to all adjacent creatures at the start of its turn (save ends both).

Tail Swipe (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +29 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 damage, and if the target attempts to move or shift away from Machalos before the end of Machalos's next turn, Machalos can make a *hellish trident* attack against the target as an immediate interrupt.

Back-Breaker (standard; encounter)
Reach 2; targets an enemy of Large size or smaller; +29 vs. Reflex; 4d8 + 8 damage and the target is pushed 8 squares. If the target ends this forced movement in a square adjacent to another enemy, Machalos can immediately use the *discard refuse* power.

Wild Frenzy (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Machalos makes a hellish trident and tail swipe attack.

Discard Refuse (no action; usable only when *back-breaker* hits a target; encounter)
Ranged 8; targets a creature adjacent to the target of the *back-breaker* power; +31 vs. AC; 4d8 + 4 damage and the target is knocked prone.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Athletics +25, Intimidate +20

Str 26 (+20)	**Dex** 19 (+16)	**Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 28 (+21)	**Int** 25 (+19)	**Cha** 16 (+15)

and clearly dying. Alloces—more because he saw an opportunity than out of any affection for his former companion—saved Machalos's life by placing him in a newly constructed, patchwork body. Machalos is hideously resentful of his loss of power, for his new body is markedly weaker than that of a true pit fiend, but he remains grateful to Alloces for saving his life.

Encounter Groups

When not accompanying Alloces, Machalos fights in the company of his master's various creations.

Level 23 Encounter (XP 26,900)
✦ Machalos (level 24 soldier)
✦ 1 shrieking steed (level 16 skirmisher)
✦ 1 war devil (level 22 brute)
✦ 3 advanced infernal hounds (level 23 soldiers)

About the Author

Ari Marmell has been shirking homework in favor of playing the D&D® game since he was nine years old. Thankfully, he now works in the industry, since shirking work for gaming tends to wreak havoc with the bills. He has written for quite a few of the industry's major companies, including White Wolf and, of course, Wizards of the Coast.

Doubts and Uncertainties

Machalos's loyalty to Alloces has begun, ever so slightly, to fray around the edges. The so-called Sutured Fiend is beginning to wonder, based on seeing some of his master's other creations, if Alloces couldn't place him in a more potent body. He speculates if the loss of power he has endured by losing his original form couldn't be rectified.

So far, all Machalos has are vague suspicions—suspicions that he knows might be inspired by nothing more than a desire to regain his past might. Should he ever discover that Alloces could grant him a more potent form and has chosen not to do so, however, his gratitude toward the devil who saved his life could easily shift to a burning, vengeance-driven hatred.

The Brood of Alloces

by Ari Marmell

illustrations by Ryan Barger and Chris Seaman

KNOWN VARIABLY as the Prince of Beasts and the Butcher of Nessus, the devil Alloces is Hell's own mad surgeon. Though his influence in the infernal hierarchy comes from his services as stable-master to Asmodeus and other archdevils, keeping and breeding their herds, his obsession, his love, and his greatest claim to infamy comes in his efforts to create new monsters. He is a depraved sculptor: the flesh and the souls of living beings are his clay, and his "works of art" suffer eternal torment even as their new, monstrous urges set them to inflicting their own pain on others. Although artificially assembled, most of Alloces's creations harbor a true spark of life.

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The following monsters are among the most infamous of Alloces's creations, but they represent only a small fraction of his "children."

The Butcher's Servitors

When pitting your PCs against the minions, creations, and allies of Alloces, you needn't limit yourself solely to the creatures presented in this article. A few simple cosmetic tweaks to otherwise mundane opponents can help portray the devil's twisted mind and even more twisted creations.

For instance, suppose you want to pit the PCs against a wide variety of humanoid creatures that boast bestial features, since they've all been melded together from human souls and predatory spirits. You can, of course, create brand new monsters to meet that need, but if you're lacking time, consider pulling humanoids of the appropriate level out of the *Monster Manual*—humans, orcs, eladrin, what have you—and then altering their appearance and the nature of their attacks. Starting with an orc brute, simply describe it as having a wolflike head and running on all fours, and change its axe attack to a bite attack. The result is a creature that is mechanically direct from the book, but clearly represents the fruits of Alloces's vile labors.

Creeping Teeth

Even the leftover pieces of Alloces's experiments do not go to waste. Using teeth, bone shards, and other hard bits from the bodies of his subjects, the devil has created a lurking predator capable of wrapping itself around its prey and shredding it like a living maw.

Creeping Teeth **Level 9 Lurker**
Large immortal beast (blind, living construct, ooze) XP 800

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +7; blindsight 10, tremorsense 15
HP 77; **Bloodied** 38
AC 23; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 21
Immune gaze; **Resist** 5 melee and ranged attacks
Speed 6; see also *consume*

⊕ **Toothy Slam** (standard; at-will)
+14 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Consume (standard; at-will)
The creeping teeth attacks one Medium or smaller target; +12 vs. Reflex (automatically hits creatures that the creeping teeth has combat advantage against). On a hit, the target is grabbed and pulled into the creeping teeth's space; the target is dazed and takes ongoing 10 damage until it escapes the grab. A creature that escapes the grab shifts to a square of its choosing adjacent to the creeping teeth. The creeping teeth can move normally while creatures are engulfed within it.

Parting Shot (immediate reaction; when a creature escapes the creeping teeth's grab; at-will)
The creeping teeth makes a *toothy slam* attack against the creature that just escaped its grab.

Creeping Skitter (standard; at-will)
The creeping teeth shifts 3 squares and designates a single target within 6 squares; that target grants the creeping teeth combat advantage until the end of the creeping teeth's next turn.

Rain of Teeth (move; recharge ⚅)
The creeping teeth shifts 6 squares, ignoring difficult terrain.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +14

Str 13 (+5)	**Dex** 21 (+9)	**Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 17 (+7)	**Int** 1 (-1)	**Cha** 1 (-1)

Creeping Teeth Tactics

The creeping teeth waits in hiding, attacking as prey passes by it. It uses *consume* immediately, unless circumstances prevent it, and it attempts to *consume* multiple targets. It might release its prey to obtain a better tactical position, and it uses *rain of teeth* to pass through some foes to go after more vulnerable targets. It might *appear* to flee while it attempts to hide and regain combat advantage, but it lacks any sense of self-preservation and fights to the death once it has chosen to attack.

Creeping Teeth Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 14: Creeping teeth are a creation of Alloces, the devil called the Butcher of Nessus. It consists not only of teeth, but bones and similar body parts.

Creeping teeth aren't *technically* oozes, but because they hang together and move in the same fashion as a viscous fluid, and since they share all the standard traits of an ooze, they qualify as oozes for all intents and purposes.

Encounter Groups

Creeping teeth aren't intelligent enough to deliberately ally with other creatures, but they are sometimes specifically placed alongside other creatures that they aren't likely to see as prey.

Level 8 Encounter (XP 1,850)
✦ 2 cambion hellswords (level 8 brute)
✦ 1 creeping teeth (level 9 elite lurker)
✦ 1 flameskull (level 8 artillery)

Melded Souls

Perhaps the most infamous and horrifying of Alloces's creations, "melded souls" are just that: nightmares assembled of the souls—and in some cases, body parts—of multiple mortals. The individual personas remain alive and intact enough to understand what has become of them—so they shriek and gibber in constant torment—but the creature as a whole is driven by a vicious, bestial mind that remains uninfluenced by its component parts.

Damned Choir

A writhing, wailing mass of humanoid souls, bound together in space and given substance, damned choirs seek nothing more than the comfort of the living bodies they have lost and can never regain. How much of their attacks on mortal beings are driven by that urge, and how much by rage and madness, is unclear, but their burning need to slaughter all who cross their path is unmistakable.

Damned Choir **Level 11 Soldier**
Large immortal humanoid (living construct, swarm) XP 600

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
Soul-Chilling Presence (Fear) aura 4; living creatures within the aura take a -4 penalty to Will.
Swarm Attack aura 1; the damned choir makes a basic attack as a free action against each enemy that starts its turn within the aura.
HP 114; **Bloodied** 57
AC 27; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 22
Immune fear; **Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks
Speed fly 8 (hover)

⊕ **Damned Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
+16 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 5 psychic damage, and if the target deals damage to any creature other than the damned choir before the start of the damned choir's next turn, the target takes 5 psychic damage and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

✧ **Screams of the Damned** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 3; +16 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 5 psychic damage.

✧ **Shriek of the Damned** (minor; recharge ⚅) • **Fear**
Close burst 5; +16 vs. Will; the target is immobilized (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Str 14 (+7) **Dex** 21 (+10) **Wis** 11 (+5)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 7 (+3) **Cha** 18 (+9)

Damned Choir Tactics

These horrid creatures prefer to move in close, using *shriek of the damned* to keep other foes immobile while focusing their melee and aura attacks on a chosen target. They save *screams of the damned* for when multiple foes converge upon them. Damned choirs know nothing of retreat or fear, and they fight to the end.

Carpet of Flesh

A foul accumulation of layers of flesh, hunks of muscle, and imprisoned souls, the carpet of flesh is almost as much a sentient trap as it is a monster. Those unfortunate enough to stumble upon them—sometimes literally—can look forward to a hideous death as they are torn apart by randomly formed limbs of partially animate flesh.

Carpet of Flesh **Level 15 Elite Controller**
Gargantuan immortal beast (living construct, ooze) XP 2,400

Initiative +10 **Senses Perception** +12; blindsight 20, tremorsense 20
Caustic Humors (Acid) aura 0 (see *viscous nature*); any creature that starts its turn in the carpet's space takes 10 acid damage.
Soul-Chilling Presence (Fear) aura 4; living creatures within the aura take a -4 penalty to Will.
HP 302; **Bloodied** 151
AC 29; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 27
Immune fear; **Resist** half damage from ranged and area attacks
Saving Throws +2
Speed 2
Action Points 1

⊕ **Reaching Arms** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is pulled 3 squares and grabbed until escape. If the target is within the carpet of flesh's space, it slides 3 squares (instead of being pulled).

⊕ **Crush** (minor; at-will)
A single grabbed target only; +19 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the carpet sustains the grab.

ǂ **Grasping Arms** (standard; at-will)
The carpet of flesh makes two reaching arm attacks.

ǂ **Reeling Grab** (minor; at-will)
The carpet of flesh slides one adjacent, grabbed target into the nearest square within the carpet's space.

Chameleon
A carpet of flesh can remain hidden with the Stealth skill even without cover or concealment.

Mobile Grappler
The carpet of flesh can move at full speed even when grabbing one or more foes without breaking the grab.

Viscous Nature
Other creatures can move through the carpet of flesh's space, treating the squares it occupies as difficult terrain. A carpet of flesh threatens all squares it occupies.

Alignment Evil **Languages** – **Skills** Stealth +15
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 17 (+10) **Wis** 20 (+12)
Con 23 (+13) **Int** 3 (+3) **Cha** 3 (+3)

Carpet of Flesh Tactics

Although not a lurker per se, a carpet of flesh lies in wait for targets. It prefers to place itself in environments where foes cannot hang back and lob attacks at it from a distance. It coats the floors—and, if space allows, even the walls—of the area in which it waits, attacking all creatures that draw near or attempt to pass through its space. It attempts to drag foes into its space if they aren't in it already, and it keeps them grappled, crushing the life from them.

Vile Host

Another of Alloces's "patchwork" creations, the vile host appears as nothing so much as an enormous golem made of tattered soul-stuff. Warped and twisted together like so much melted wax, a handful of individual spirits shriek and wail, while their faces appear at random across the host's vaguely humanoid shape even as it lumbers forward to attack.

"Melded souls" are just that: nightmares assembled of the souls — and in some cases, body parts — of multiple mortals.

Vile Host (conjoined form) **Level 17 Solo Soldier**
Huge immortal humanoid (living construct) XP 8,000

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Soul-Chilling Presence (Fear) aura 4; living creatures within the aura take a -4 penalty to Will.
HP 660; **Bloodied** a vile host in its conjoined form is never considered bloodied; see *bloodied dissolution*
AC 33; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 29
Immune fear
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8
Action Points 2

Slam (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +24 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target cannot shift until the end of the vile host's next turn.

Soul-Shaking Stare (minor 1/turn; at will) ✦ **Fear**
Ranged 12; +22 vs. Will; the target is dazed until the end of the vile host's next turn.

Slam Frenzy (standard; at-will)
The vile host (conjoined form) makes three slam attacks.

Devastating Slam (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Reach 3; +24 vs. AC; 4d10 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 6 squares and knocked prone.

Keep Back (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves adjacent to the vile host; at-will)
+24 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Sweeping Slam (standard; at-will)
Close burst 3; +24 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage.

Bloodied Dissolution
When a vile host in conjoined form is reduced to 330 hit points or fewer, the vile host (conjoined form) is removed from play and is replaced by 5 other monsters: a vile host spirit shaker component, two vile host spirit shredder components, and two vile host spirit smasher components. The components appear in any unoccupied square anywhere in vile host's original space, or within 4 squares of those spaces. The vile host components act on the same initiative count as the vile host (component form).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 19 (+12) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 7 (+6) **Cha** 9 (+7)

Vile Host Shaker Component **Level 17 Controller**
Medium immortal humanoid (living construct) XP –

Initiative – **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Soul-Chilling Presence (Fear) aura 2; living creatures within the aura take a -4 penalty to Will.
HP 82; vile host components are always considered bloodied
AC 31; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Immune fear
Speed 6

Slam (standard; at-will)
+24 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage.

Soul-Shaking Stare (standard; at will) ✦ **Fear**
Ranged 12; +22 vs. Will; 1d8 + 7 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the vile host shaker's next turn.

Earth-Shaking Slam (standard; at-will)
Close blast 4; +22 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 7 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Rend Earth (standard; encounter)
Close blast 4; +22 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 7 damage, and the area of the blast becomes difficult terrain.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 19 (+12) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 7 (+6) **Cha** 9 (+7)

Vile Host Churner Component **Level 17 Skirmisher**
Medium immortal humanoid (living construct) XP –

Initiative – **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Soul-Chilling Presence (Fear) aura 2; living creatures within the aura take a -4 penalty to Will.
HP 82; vile host components are always considered bloodied
AC 31; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Immune fear
Speed 8

Slam (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +24 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the vile host churner component shifts 2 squares.

Keep Back (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves adjacent to the vile host churner component; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
+24 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Swirling Strike (standard; encounter)
The vile host churner component can shift up to 4 squares before making its attack. +24 vs. AC; 4d8 + 7 damage. The vile host churner can shift up to 4 squares after the attack is resolved.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 19 (+12) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 7 (+6) **Cha** 9 (+7)

Vile Host Smasher Component	Level 17 Soldier
Medium immortal humanoid (living construct)	XP –
Initiative –	**Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Soul-Chilling Presence (**Fear**) aura 2; living creatures within the aura take a -4 penalty to Will.	
HP 82; vile host components are always considered bloodied	
AC 33; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29	
Immune fear	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+24 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target cannot shift until the end of the vile host smasher component's next turn.	
⸸ **Devastating Slam** (standard; encounter)	
+24 vs. AC; 4d10 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares, ignoring intervening terrain and falling prone.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Supernal
Str 24 (+15)	**Dex** 19 (+12) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 21 (+13)	**Int** 7 (+6) **Cha** 9 (+7)

Vile Host Tactics

In its conjoined form, the vile host lumbers into melee, often initiating battle with its *sweeping slam* to impede as many foes as possible. It might follow up, either by using an action point or in the following round, with a *devastating slam* against the toughest-looking target it can reach. From that point onward it remains in close melee, alternating between *sweeping slam* and whatever abilities might recharge as it pummels its foes into jelly.

Once it has been bloodied and split into its component souls, the host's tactics change accordingly. The smasher components continue to fight just as the conjoined form did, staying in the thick of melee. The shredders appear to the sides, where possible, and attempt to remain on the periphery of combat, shifting in and out of range. The shaker component appears as far from the foe as circumstances allow and attempts to remain there, supporting its allies from a distance with *soul-shaking stare*, or with *earth-shaking slam* if that power has recharged and the shaker is close enough to use it.

Shrieking Steed

Horrific war-mounts made up of humanoid souls, shrieking steeds are Alloces's most coveted creation, at least among his fellow devils. Four pairs of humanoid legs allow the creature to scuttle forward in any direction, while the torsos and arms warp backward to join into a deformed body on which the rider sits. Between each set of legs hangs an upside-down screaming face, which allows the steed to see in all directions at once.

Shrieking Steed	Level 16 Skirmisher
Huge immortal beast (living construct, mount)	XP 1,400
Initiative +20	**Senses** Perception +23; all-around vision, darkvision
Soul-Chilling Presence (**Fear**) aura 2; living creatures within the aura take a -4 penalty to Will.	
HP 160; **Bloodied** 80	
AC 30; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28	
Immune fear	
Speed 10	
⊕ **Kick** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 3; +21 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage.	
⇜ **Horrid Wail** (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic, Thunder**	
Close burst 3; +26 vs. Fortitude; 4d8 + 8 psychic and thunder damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the steed's next turn. The steed's rider is immune.	
Hellish Gate (minor; when mounted by a friendly rider of 16th level or higher; encounter) ✦ **Mount, Teleportation**	
The steed and its rider teleport 5 squares.	
Tandem Mount (when mounted by a friendly rider of 16th level or higher; at-will) ✦ **Mount**	
When the steed's rider spends an action point to gain an extra action, the steed can also take an extra move action.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Understands Common and Supernal
Skills Acrobatics +23, Athletics +24, Endurance +23, Perception +23	
Str 27 (+16)	**Dex** 24 (+15) **Wis** 24 (+15)
Con 24 (+15)	**Int** 5 (+5) **Cha** 17 (+11)

Shrieking Steed Tactics

For the most part, a shrieking steed behaves in combat as directed. It normally holds off on using its *horrid wail* until already in the midst of foes, rather than initiating combat with it.

Melded Soul Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 18: Melded souls are the most infamous creations of Alloces, the Butcher of Nessus. Each is a monster formed, literally, of damned souls given substance. Each individual soul suffers in eternal torment, but it has no ability to communicate or control the amalgam of which it is a part.

Because they are constructed of the tormented damned, melded souls generate a sense of horror—of sheer "wrongness—that weighs heavily on the souls of living beings who draw too near.

DC 23: The damned choir is a mass of screaming souls that seek the comfort and warmth of the living bodies they've lost. Their shrieks can cause substantial harm, but they prefer close attacks as they tear the life from their prey.

Carpets of flesh are perhaps the most grotesque of the melded souls, since they consist of coatings of flesh, muscle, and soul-stuff. They reach out to tear the life from all who would pass over them.

Peculiarly, the magic bonds that hold the vile host together seem designed to shatter after the beast takes a certain amount of damage, allowing a single massive creature to literally dissolve into a handful of smaller—but no less brutal—opponents.

DC 25: Shrieking steeds are coveted by other devils. They can use short-range teleportation, traverse walls and ceilings, and are almost impossible to sneak up on or flank.

Encounter Groups

Melded souls normally fight alongside, or are placed by, other devils or evil beings who have acquired them from Alloces's "stock."

Level 11 Encounter (XP 3,100)
✦ 1 chain devil (level 11 skirmisher)
✦ 2 damned choirs (level 11 soldier)
✦ 1 succubus (level 9 controller)
✦ 6 legion devil hellguards (level 11 minion)

Level 21 Encounter (XP 17,250)
✦ 1 shrieking steed (level 23 skirmisher)
✦ 1 vile host (level 17 solo soldier)
✦ 1 war devil (level 22 brute)

NESSIAN HOUNDS

Bred to serve as hunters and harriers, guards and weapons, these are the dogs of war of the Nine Hells. Intended to run prey to ground and then remain in combat until that prey is torn apart, the hounds are versatile combatants as the battle progresses.

Three of the most common Nessian hound varieties are presented here.

Soulstuff Hound **Level 8 Soldier**
Medium immortal magical beast (living construct) XP 350
Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision; see also *blood scent*
HP 89; **Bloodied** 44; many of the hound's powers and features change when bloodied (see below)
AC 22 (24 when bloodied); **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 20; see also *cloak of illumination*
Immune fear; **Resist** insubstantial (when not bloodied)
Speed 8, phasing (when not bloodied)
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+15 vs. AC (+16 when bloodied); 1d8 + 2 damage, plus the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both)
Blood Scent
A Nessian hound takes no penalties to attack rolls from concealment against bloodied targets.
Cloak of Illumination
The hound's peculiar flesh seems to blend and ripple in the light. The hound is considered to have concealment in any area of bright illumination.
Protective Discorporation
A Nessian hound ceases to be insubstantial and loses its phasing ability when it is bloodied.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Athletics +14, Perception +12 (+17 when tracking), Stealth +12
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 17 (+7)
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 6 (+2) **Cha** 13 (+5)

Hellfire Hound **Level 12 Soldier**
Medium immortal magical beast (living construct) XP 700
Initiative +12 **Senses Perception** +15; darkvision; see also *blood scent*
Fiery Wreath (Fire) aura 3; creatures that start their turns in the aura gain vulnerable 5 fire until the end of their next turns; devils and other Nessian hounds are immune.
HP 123; **Bloodied** 61
AC 26 (28 when bloodied); **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 24
Immune fear; **Resist** insubstantial (when not bloodied), 10 fire
Speed 8, phasing (when not bloodied)
⊕ **Burning Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
+19 vs. AC (+20 when bloodied); 1d8 + 6 damage, plus the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage and the target takes a -4 penalty to opportunity attacks (save ends both).
↯ **Burning Blood** (immediate reaction, when struck by a melee attack while bloodied; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
+17 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 6 fire damage.
↯ **Roar of Flame** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
Close blast 4; +17 vs. Reflex (+18 when bloodied); 3d8 + 6 fire damage and the hellfire hound gains a +4 bonus on opportunity attacks against the target (save ends).
Blood Scent
A Nessian hound takes no penalties to attack rolls from concealment against bloodied targets.
Protective Discorporation
A Nessian hound ceases to be insubstantial and loses its phasing ability when it is bloodied.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Athletics +17, Perception +15 (+20 when tracking), Stealth +15
Str 22 (+12) **Dex** 19 (+10) **Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 19 (+10) **Int** 6 (+4) **Cha** 13 (+7)

The name "hound" refers more to how the beasts are used than to their physical form.

Infernal Hound **Level 16 Soldier**
Large immortal magical beast (living construct) XP 1,400
Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +18; darkvision; see also *blood scent*
Fiery Wreath (Fire) aura 3; creatures that start their turns in the aura gain vulnerable 5 fire until the end of their next turns; devils and other Nessian hounds are immune.
HP 157; **Bloodied** 78
AC 29 (31 when bloodied); **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 28
Immune fear; **Resist** insubstantial (when not bloodied), 10 fire, 10 necrotic
Speed 10, phasing (when not bloodied)
⊕ **Hellish Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Reach 2; +23 vs. AC (+24 when bloodied); 1d10 + 7 fire and necrotic damage, plus the target takes ongoing 5 fire and necrotic damage and the infernal hound gains 10 temporary hit points whenever the target makes an attack that does not include the infernal hound as a target (save ends both)
↯ **Horrid Bay** (minor, usable only when not bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 3; targets enemies only; +19 vs. Will; target is marked by the infernal hound (save ends).
↯ **Deathly Howl** (standard, only when bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Close blast 4; +19 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized and takes a -2 penalty to all saves (save ends both). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target takes ongoing 10 fire and necrotic damage and takes a -2 penalty to all saves (save ends both). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target takes ongoing 15 fire and necrotic damage and the target deals 5 fire and necrotic damage to all adjacent creatures at the start of its turn (save ends both).
Blood Scent
A Nessian hound takes no penalties to attack rolls from concealment against bloodied targets.
Protective Discorporation
A Nessian hound ceases to be insubstantial and loses its phasing ability when it is bloodied.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Athletics +20, Intimidate +15, Perception +18 (+23 when tracking), Stealth +18
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 21 (+13) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 6 (+6) **Cha** 15 (+10)

Nessian Hound Tactics

All Nessian hounds can track prey across great distances, and they have been known to run their prey into exhaustion for the sheer fun of it before attacking. In battle, the hounds stay in motion by using their phasing ability to pass through one foe to attack another. Once bloodied, they shift tactics to focus on a single foe, sticking with it rather than darting around the battle.

Hellfire and infernal hounds prefer to use their area attacks early, and they move in to unleash the attack and then peel away once more. If it can catch at least two or three targets in it the blast, the infernal hound uses its *deathly howl* as soon as possible after being bloodied.

Nessian Hound Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 15: Nessian hounds are trackers and beasts of war that are bred for use by the devils of the Nine Hells by Alloces, the Butcher of Nessus. They are formed by an amalgamation of mortal souls, the spirits of predatory animals, and the stuff of Hell itself. Infernal hounds combine both the "soul-matter" and the hellfire of their weaker brethren.

The name "hound" refers more to how the beasts are used than to their physical form. While some do indeed appear as hounds, others resemble different predatory beasts, and a few are even humanoid. Their appearance in this regard seems to have little impact on their personalities or abilities.

Because they come in such a variety of sizes and forms, adventurers and sages of the past have often mistaken individuals or packs of Nessian hounds for unique types of creatures. Soulstuff hounds with a feline form, for instance, were once thought of as a specific type of devil called a hellcat, and packs of canine infernal hounds running through the dark night spawned tales of beasts called yeth hounds.

DC 20: Bred to run their prey to ground, Nessian hounds change their tactics once they've been injured enough to suggest that the battle is well and truly joined. From swift harriers, they become stalwart terrors, often focusing all their efforts on a single target.

Encounter Groups

Nessian hounds always hunt in packs—either of other hounds or of other allied creatures. They willingly ally themselves with almost any evil creature, so long as they have the opportunity to hunt, though they prefer working alongside devils.

Level 9 Encounter (XP 2,000)
- ✦ 2 hell hounds (level 7 brute)
- ✦ 1 oni night haunter (level 8 elite controller)
- ✦ 2 soulstuff hounds (level 8 soldier)

Seraphic Golem

Among Alloces's earliest creations, these golems are constructed from the meat and astral substances of dead angels. As mindless and brutal as any golem, they're even more horrible, for they suggest that *nothing* ultimately escapes the fate of all flesh.

Seraphic Golem	Level 22 Elite Brute
Large immortal animate (construct)	XP 8,300

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
HP 514; **Bloodied** 257
AC 34; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 30
Immune disease, fear, poison, sleep; **Resist** 15 cold, 15 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, fly 9 (clumsy); can't shift
Action Points 1

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant**
Reach 2; +25 vs. AC (+27 while bloodied); 2d6 + 8 damage plus 2d8 radiant damage.

⊕ **Wing Slap** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +25 vs. AC (+27 while bloodied); 2d6 + 8 damage plus 2d8 radiant damage, and the seraphic golem slides the target 2 squares.

Seraphic Assault (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant**
The golem makes a slam attack and a wing slap attack. If the golem hits the same creature with both attacks, the target is knocked prone

Stomp (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Adjacent prone targets only; +25 vs. AC (+27 while bloodied); 3d10 + 8 damage.

Vengeful Burst (immediate reaction, when damaged by an attack; at-will) ✦ **Radiant**
Close blast 2; +23 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 8 radiant damage and the target is blinded until the end of the golem's next turn.

Radiant Rampage (standard; recharge when first bloodied) ✦ **Radiant**
The seraphic becomes insubstantial until the end of its turn and moves up to 12 squares, taking no penalties to movement for squeezing and can move through enemy spaces. When it enters any creature's space, the golem makes a slam attack against that creature; on a hit, all of the slam attack's damage is considered radiant damage. The golem must end its movement in an unoccupied space and can make only one slam attack against any target while using this ability.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 25 (+18)	**Dex** 20 (+16)	**Wis** 17 (+14)
Con 27 (+19)	**Int** 3 (+7)	**Cha** 3 (+7)

Seraphic Golem Tactics

The seraphic golem initiates combat with its *radiant rampage*, preferring to end its move within reach of at least one target, against which it can then turn its *seraphic assault* and possibly stomp attacks. In many instances, it uses its action point in this first round, which allows it to truly lay into a target. It continues to use *radiant rampage* when the power recharges, but often returns to focus its physical attacks on its starting target.

Seraphic Golem Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana or Religion check. In addition to the information presented here, the same Arcana check (but not Religion) can reveal the standard golem information as presented in the *Monster Manual* (page 142).

DC 24: Seraphic golems are among Alloces's earliest creations, from just after the end of Asmodeus's war of rebellion. They are manufactured from the bodies of dead angels, and they retain some aspect of angelic power. Unlike his later creations, which include a spark of life, seraphic golems are true constructs—animate but not living.

Like his other creations, Alloces sells or trades seraphic golems to other devils, and occasionally non-diabolic evil creatures.

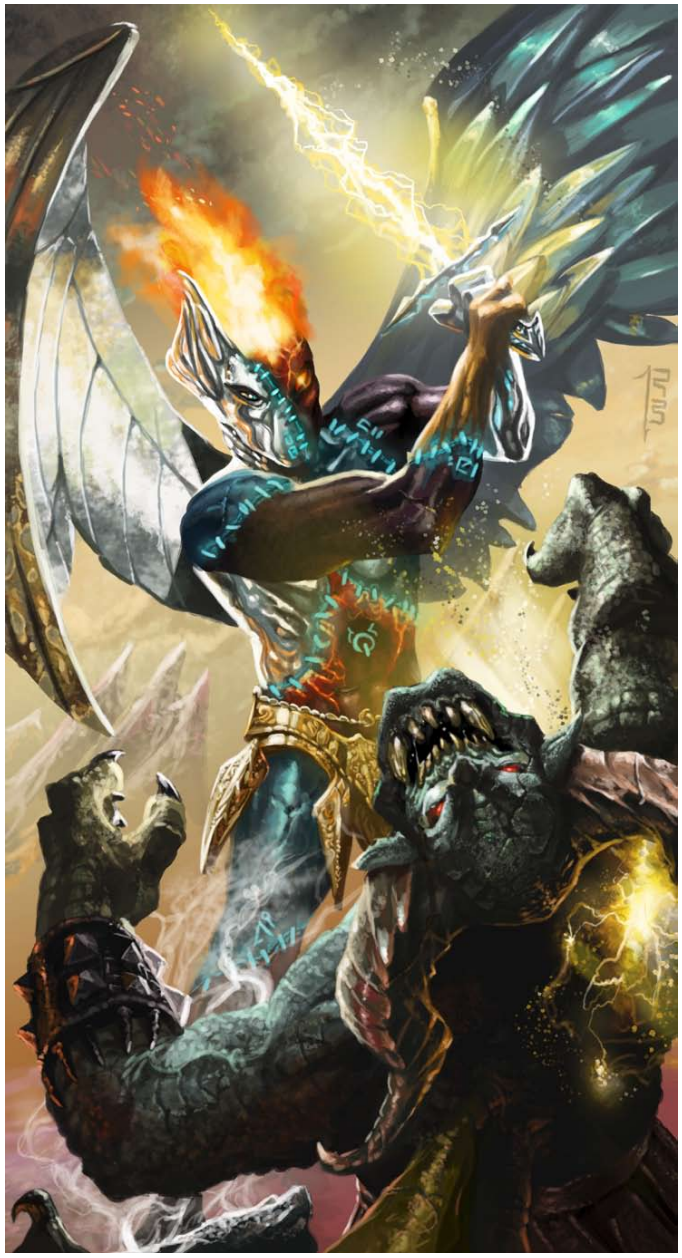
Encounter Groups

Like other golems, seraphic golems serve the being their creator commands them to serve, and, as a result, they can be found in the presence of a variety of evil overlords.

Level 22 Encounter (XP 22,050)
✦ 1 advanced cambion hellfire magus (level 22 artillery)
✦ 2 ice devils (level 20 soldier)
✦ 1 seraphic golem (level 22 elite brute)
✦ 5 legion devil legionnaires (level 21 minion)

About the Author

Ari Marmell has been shirking homework in favor of playing the D&D® game since he was nine years old. Thankfully, he now works in the industry, since shirking work for gaming tends to wreak havoc with the bills. He has written for quite a few of the industry's major companies, including White Wolf and, of course, Wizards of the Coast.



Ecology of the Sharn

by Brian R. James

illustrations by Eva Widermann

Lyrna could suppress her tears no longer. She wasn't the only one overcome by the senseless devastation around her. Others in the procession openly wept at the blighted sore their homeland had become. Where once stood rolling hills wreathed in verdant foliage now stood barren moorland—twisted and inimical to life. Behind her, the walls of Myth Akherynnar faded away into the cloying mists. She, the last scion of House Fathomlin, understood her duty well, yet the young elf knew in her heart it would be the last time she would set eyes upon the shining capital.

Whispering a prayer to the fey spirits, Lyrna tightened the grip on her staff and quickened her pace. With the blessing of the spirits, the elves would reach the Tosofome Caldera by dawn of the third day. There they would initiate the high magic ritual that would drive the Killing Storm back from whence it came—to the boughs of Aryvandaar.

The hiss of acid rain driven hard against her protective wards drew Lyrna back to the present. Looking around, she was momentarily shocked to discover she was no longer among the procession. Eyes widening, she saw that she was standing among the shattered ruins of Faer'tel'miir, ninety miles to the north. Yet how could this be?

Shock turned to mute horror as an oily abomination from out of her nightmares materialized from the wall before her, three eel-like heads turning to regard her despite their lack of eyes.

"Miyeritar is lost," intoned three distinct voices. "But through us your civilization can endure."

Lyrna found her voice at last, issuing a full-throated scream as oily black goo seeped up from the ground to engulf her.

Legend and Lore

Sharns are an enigma little understood by sages and rightfully feared by adventurers. Born of the last remnants of a dead world, these timeless beings embody raw eldritch might. They might rise to rule the mortal world, if they cared and could put their minds to it, but their agenda seems more sophisticated than temporal wealth or power. Their motives are alien and ever shifting. Some dare claim the sharns are insane. Sharns assert that what others call insanity is actually enlightenment.

Origin of the Sharns

Most aberrant creatures seem to lack coherent explanation, and the sharns are no exception. Long has their origin been shrouded in mystery, for the sharns never speak of it to nonsharns and no divination illuminates the truth. Some scholars cite the aberrant physiology and strange magic of the sharns as evidence of their link to the Far Realm. Yet the truth of their creation is more bizarre and complex than a mere link to the Outside.

Here the true origin of the sharns is revealed. Such truth is perilous lore indeed. Many have lost their sanity in an attempt to comprehend matters anathema to the mortal psyche.

The Shattering

Somewhere at the dawn of the cosmos, the elder god Tharizdun stretched forth his hand to clutch a shard of utter evil. This simple act exposed creation to the perverse remains of another universe that evil had destroyed. The power-hungry god was doomed to an eternity of madness, his mind shattered and scattered into other realities.

In one reality—the "true" universe known to mortals today—Tharizdun carried the crystalline fragment into the heart of the primordial vastness and planted it there, giving birth to the Abyss. This act awakened the elder primordials to the burgeoning power of the gods, and soon war raged across all creation. Tharizdun was ultimately imprisoned for his effrontery, and the gods gained the upper hand against the primordials. Since that time, the universe has enjoyed at least the seeming of an uneasy peace.

The End of all Things

How different might the world be today if the primordials had won the Dawn War instead of the gods? In such a world, would Tharizdun have avoided imprisonment to carry out his mad scheme to unmake the universe? Such a universe does exist. On the surface, it seems little different from our own, but peer a little more closely, and it quickly becomes apparent that something has gone horribly wrong.

All that was remains as a devastated world drifting within a decaying corpse of a universe. Skeletons of buildings, cities, and whole civilizations dot this world of dust and twilight. Jagged bolts of lightning illuminate the gray vault of the sky, born from ink-black clouds that circle the decaying world like stalking predators. Above the world hangs a feeble, collapsing sun, ringed by a halo of utter darkness.

Here Tharizdun's will is manifest in a world whose fate is dust and death. Between the booming thunder, the roar of unquenchable fire, and the violent cracking of the brittle earth, ethereal whispers echo from the void. These haunting wails emanate from the sharns, the last beings to bear witness to the end of all things in their version of creation.

Birthed of Doom

The sharns alone stand sentinel over this world of bones and ruins. Having achieved his ends, Tharizdun abandoned this universe eons ago. So mighty had the mad god become that he shed his divinity in a grand apotheosis, becoming something beyond a god—something perverse and outside the known.

The sharns remained as the sentient remnant of all Tharizdun had destroyed and abandoned—a collective of merged consciousnesses. For a time, forsaken and alone on a dying world, this chaotic amalgam watched and waited. It's unclear whether curiosity or boredom drove it to act, but soon the roiling amorphous form of pitch-black "sharnstuff" began to move across the brittle landscape. Something within drove it to explore and catalog the dying world.

To speed its study, the sharnstuff formed manifestations in the likeness of the tripartite Juna, extinct eel-like beings whose ruined metropolises dotted the otherwise lifeless world. Knowing their time to be short, these sharns gorged themselves on all the knowledge they could consume. Within a few short years, the sharns had acquired thousands of magic implements unearthed around the globe. With the eldritch artifacts and the latent divine energy infused in their skin, the sharns attempted a ritual to escape

Evolution of the Sharns

The sharns are the original creation of Ed Greenwood, and they appear briefly in the acclaimed AD&D® 2nd Edition adventure boxed set *Ruins of Undermountain* in 1991. Subsequent supplements, including *Netheril: Empire of Magic*, paint the sharns as adversaries of the malevolent phaerimm; the sharns' primary motivation was to prevent the abuse of magic and preserve the lore of doomed civilizations. In 2006, the sharns were central to the plot of the novel *Blackstaff* by Steven E. Schend, yet the true genesis of this enigmatic creature remained elusive. Now, in 2009, we bring the sharns into the core D&D® universe to share the spotlight with aboleths, illithids, and other memorable aberrant creatures.

their doomed universe. They succeeded and arrived deep in the Underdark of the known mortal world.

As the sharns moved into the known world, transmuted rock sent a blizzard of black sand billowing forth from a tear in reality. From within that nimbus of purple light, out poured pools of ebony goo containing, here and there, bizarre creatures that were black with three eyeless heads and odd tri-clawed arms. Eldritch reactions created towering crystals, luminous and mysterious.

Elder Elemental Eye

From his place of imprisonment, Tharizdun sensed the arrival of the sharns. He instantly knew these beings were of him and yet were not of him, and the paradox was delicious. With this fortuitous omen, the Chained God began a to call to the sharns. If they ever listen, who knows what could befall the world?

World of the Sharn

The world of the sharns, and the universe that encloses it, exists beyond the known cosmology. This universe once held its own Astral Sea, Elemental Chaos, Feywild, and Shadowfell. After eons of unchallenged dominion by an alternate Tharizdun, only the mortal world remains, itself a shadowy hulk of its former self.

World of Sharn Traits

Type: Mirror world on an alternate mortal world.
Size and Shape: Spherical world; bounded.
Gravity: Normal, with regions of elemental buoyancy where the world has begun to break apart into the void.
Mutability: Normal.

The only known method for traveling between the world of Sharn and the known world is through planar breaches, which occur within the Sharnlands in the Godless Deeps of the Underdark. Sharns create, guard, and maintain such breaches jealously.

Through similarly great feats of magic, the sharns have halted the total dissolution of their home world. The arcane expenditure necessary to forestall oblivion is immense and ongoing. Sharn arcanists perform the rituals daily. For this reason, most sharns encountered in the Sharn world are younger sharns. These scouts acquire magic items and assimilate the knowledge of the indigenous population to sustain the preservation of their world.

Sharn Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Dungeoneering check.

DC 20: The sharns live in the yawning depths of the Underdark in a region known as the Godless Deeps. There in the Sharnlands, the sharns live in great pools of black, amorphous goo. Immense caverns filled with intricate crystalline formations are common in this region, resembling the interior of a massive geode.

DC 25: Most elder sharns have retired to a state of eternal contemplation, leaving younger sharns to gather intelligence and defend the Sharnlands. These younger sharns take interest in the activities of mortals.

DC 30: Sharns are ancient aberrant creatures hailing from an alternate reality outside the known universe. Despite what most believe, sharns are not from the Far Realm.

DC 35: The sharns take their name from the dying world of their birth. Their signature tripartite form is an imperfect imitation of the Juna, an extinct species from the world of Sharn.

Physiology

Inquire about the sharns, and any sage on the world of Toril describes a bizarre creature with three eel-like heads and peculiar tri-claw arms. Yet this description does not represent the true form of this inscrutable being.

Skin of the Ancient Ones

In their natural state, sharns exist as amorphous pools of oily black ooze. This semifluid "sharnstuff" is slimy and cold to the touch. Through a minor act of conscious thought, a sharn can alter its composition and viscosity to adopt a physical form. The resultant form has no fine definition and maintains its signature oily black appearance.

Lacking a pulmonary system, sharns have no need to breathe. If submerged, they can remain underwater indefinitely. In fact, the sharns have no internal organs to speak of whatsoever. Flesh, nerves, and blood are alien to their aberrant composition.

Unable to reproduce naturally, sharns require hosts to join with symbiotes. Such assimilated creatures shed their individuality to join with the greater sharn community. Once an individual merges with the sharns, the process is irreversible except under extremely rare and specific conditions. Typically, the host is a willing participant, but sharns do not shy from forcibly assimilating an enemy if the threat is dire.

Effectively immortal in their natural state, sharns have been known to while away the years without ever stirring from their dark pools.

Manifestations

When a sharn manifests a corporeal form, it typically adopts its signature shape—massive tapered forms of amorphous flesh, jet-black and glistening as if coated with viscous slime and surrounded by a nimbus of

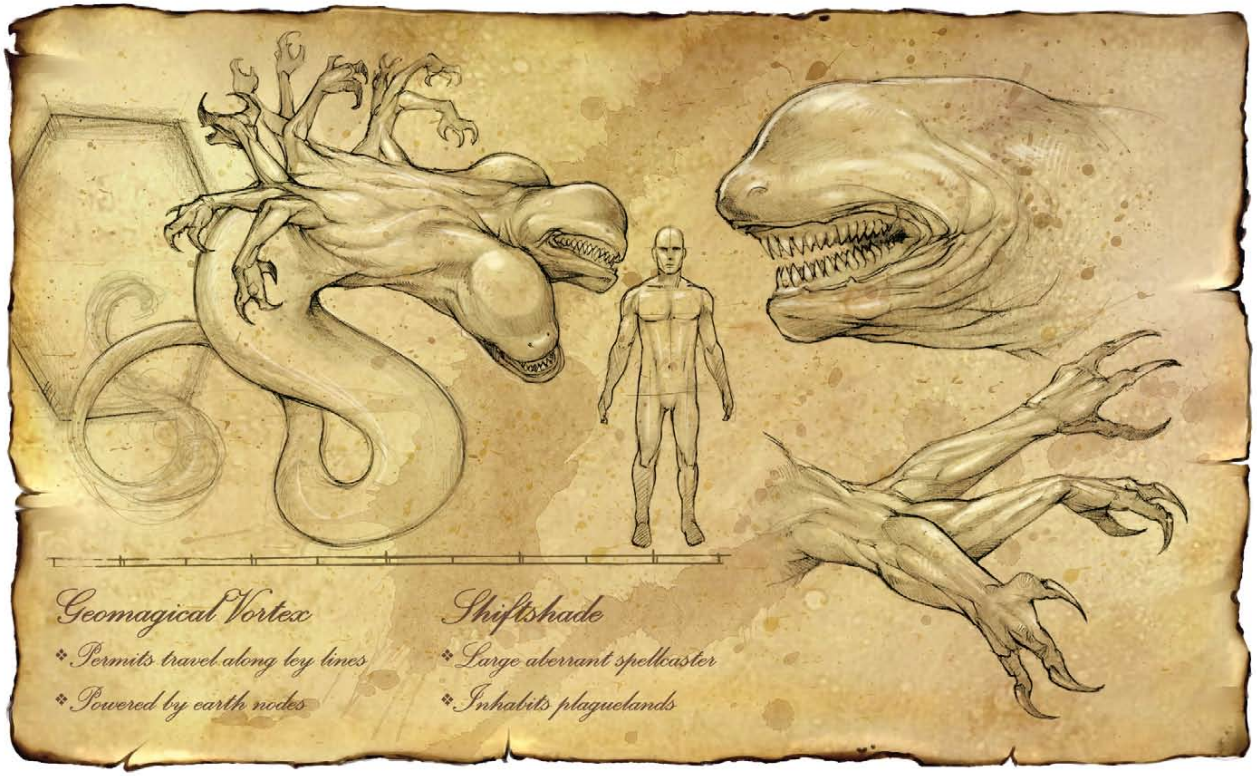
purple light. Their enormous bodies are studded with many tiny eyes that appear and disappear at random.

A sharn has three eyeless, eel-like heads, with large gaping maws filled with sharp, serrated teeth. The heads are capable of vocalizing, but sharns prefer their limited telepathic capabilities for communicating among themselves and seldom have a desire to speak with mortals. Some manner of arcane olfactory system grants the sharn a superior sense of smell.

Aside from its three heads, its peculiar limbs are another signature feature. These snakelike, flexible trunks end in an "elbow" where three humanlike forearms split apart from each other. Each arm ends in a humanlike hand topped with razor-sharp claws. Claws sprout and disappear along each of these bizarre appendages.

A sharn's heads and arms connect to a single trunk ending in a thick tail. Its streamlined torso can glide as effortlessly through water as it does air. Despite its fearsome teeth and claws, a sharn prefers to remain at range and attack through *hex portals*.

The manifestations most likely to be encountered in the world are known as blackclaws. Other varieties exist including the phaseblades, hexshadows, and the exceedingly powerful and rare shiftshades. As the caretakers of the rituals maintaining their dying world, shiftshades are masters of arcane might. These sharns appear much the same as blackclaws, though their constant state of temporal flux makes them appear as if they are phasing in and out of reality (which isn't far from the truth).



Culture

To outside observers, the sharns have a bizarre and alien culture. Sharn society is organized into subterranean communities called "pools," with no concept of social classes and no hierarchy to speak of at all. They do not concern themselves with faith or piety, nor do they covet wealth or power.

Their society is a bedlam of philosophical argument and social intrigue. Power struggles, based on ideological conflicts, are constant. This inward-looking focus does not prevent sharns from becoming embroiled in the affairs of other species, even across the planes. Exactly what their agenda might be in such cases is rarely obvious and rarely unified.

The sharns all have the same broader world-view and share a physical appearance, but they can take different paths to achieve common aims.

When a sharn is slain, however, the individual consciousnesses, at least three of which each being possesses, are lost forever.

Psychology

Despite their homogenous appearance and telepathic abilities, sharns do not operate as a hive mind. Sharns share a group consciousness that is as fragmented as any intelligence can be. Unable to operate with a single-minded purpose, the goals of the sharn appear ever changing and often contradictory.

Though they possess a paradoxical nature, sharns can work together in harmony for short periods of time, whereupon they strive for the same goal while anticipating and complementing each other's actions.

Spawned from a shared community, sharn manifestations are independent agents that can act upon their own desires and carry out their own agendas. Each manifestation has at least three entities, granting the sharns supernatural alacrity for decision-making. The more advanced a manifestation, the

more personalities it has. Multiple manifestations can act in concert, sharing a peculiar form of short-range telepathy among them.

A sharn fears little, but it is conscious of its own mortality. If a shiftshade is threatened with imminent death, it takes all avenues available to it to shift out of danger and return to its home pool. Each sharn represents the final legacy of a dead civilization, and the loss of even one sharn is a loss for the entire world.

Sharns have speak the language of madness, an inheritance of their origin. They can also speak any tongue known to their society when the need arises. When communicating with others, sharns commonly adopt complex multisyllabic names with little regard for the other's ability to pronounce it.

Their uniquely peculiar minds prevent attempts at mental contact unless the sharn wishes it. Those who have made such contact speak of a vast, turbulent ocean of consciousness upon which float tiny islands of individuality.

Magic

As beings from an alternate reality, sharns command strange magic unknown in the world today. The eldest sharns also employ unique items of power from their dying world—lesser artifacts brimming with alien power.

Earth Nodes

All sharns have a heightened ability to detect and activate earth nodes (see *Forgotten Realms® Campaign Guide* page 52 for details), but shiftshades take this mastery to a whole other level. Knowing exactly where these nodes are gives the sharns the appearance of having at-will teleportation powers. Their propensity for appearing and disappearing wherever and whenever they like makes sharns difficult foes to defeat.

Hex Portals

With fine manipulation of eldritch energy, sharns can create fissures in reality known as *hex portals*. Each portal is a small hexagonal window of light 3 feet in diameter that coalesces out of a swirl of purple motes. A sharn can maintain up to three of them at once, breaching nearly any ward or magical barrier. Opponents cannot attack a sharn through a *hex portal*.

Orb of Entropy

In addition to earth nodes and *hex portals*, powerful sharns have created this item for use by allies and minions, detailed below.

Orb of Entropy **Level 28**

The utter ruin manifest in Tharizdun's will swirls inside this globe of purest black. When activated, the orb is shrouded in a nimbus of purple light.

Lvl 28 +6 2,125,000 gp
Implement (Orb)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 psychic damage per plus
Power (Daily ✦ Psychic, Zone): Free Action. When you use a power that creates a zone, you can activate this power to make it so that any enemy that starts its turn within the zone is dazed (save ends). The body of any creature killed within the zone is immediately destroyed.

Sharn of the Forgotten Realms

"Hundreds of sharns sloughed off their shimmering black skins, and many Faertelmin stepped from the darkness to reclaim their lives as elves, humans, dwarves, centaurs, and others. Know there are yet sharn in the Realms. They choose to remain as Rhymanthiin's defenders as well as defenders against corrupt magic across the Realms."

Origin

If the dark elves of Rhymanthiin are to be believed, the first sharns of Faerûn were in fact an inadvertent byproduct of the Dark Disaster—great killing storms sent against Miyeritar during the Third Crown War. As cloying mists and ichor-choked rains scoured the Great Sapphire Wood, three high mages led the last defenders of Miyeritar into the heart of the eldritch maelstrom to counter the dark ritual.

Indicative of their desperation, the high mages invoked the rare and perilous Ritual of Myriad, whispered to be legend even in the days before the Sundering. With unbridled magic pounding against defensive wards, the mages joined mind and body to birth the first *fhaorn'quessir*—a giant-sized, tripartite being of immense power—to walk Toril in millennia.

Yet even as the *fhaorn'quessir* moved to counter the eldritch bonds of the Killing Storms, something entirely unforeseen occurred. The eldritch bonds restricting the transformative magic to the high mages of the First Circle unraveled. Unfettered, lashing tendrils of wild magic quickly enveloped the Second and Third Circles as well. With nary a moment to scream, all ninety souls, the Last Defenders of Miyeritar, were themselves subsumed into the newborn entity.

With no arcane practitioners left to maintain the ritual, the *fhaorn'quessir* began to dissolve under the onslaught of the killing storms. Through fissures in the limestone bedrock, oily black rivulets converged and flowed, forming deep black pools of amorphous goo in the lightless caverns of the Underdark. There the formless *fhaorn'quessir* waited, its merged consciousnesses pondering the mystery of its existence as the centuries passed it by.

Custodians of the Weave

After slumbering for millennia, a discordant resonance in the Weave awakened the sharns and set them to their calling as custodians of the Weave. The Dark Disaster had burned an instinctive abhorrence to the abuse of magic into the sharn psyche. Magical devastation unleashed in Calimshan during the Shattering had cemented their resolve.

After that time, the sharns sent scouts throughout Faerûn to observe from the shadows, and when necessary, to strike out against those who would wield the Art for mass destruction. When the sharns couldn't prevent such atrocities, they sought to preserve dying cultures by permitting select individuals of the doomed civilization to join their collective.

The sharns' enmity against the phaerimm is well documented, driven by the latter's employment of *life drain* magic and the resultant desertification of the Anauroch.

Plaguechanged Sharns

The Spellplague changed most sharns, magical beings that they are. Their skin, once silver and black, now runs in metallic shades of blue. The typical nimbus of purple light now manifests as cerulean plaguefire dancing across their spellscarred bodies. The deep ebony sharn pools now bubble and writhe with cobalt radiance, agitated by wild magical currents flowing within them.

Worshiped as Spellplague avatars by a cult of spellscarred zealots, the Order of Blue Fire, these plague-maddened sharns are on a mad quest. Despite the plague's nature, the sharns view its chaotic tendrils as the last remaining strands of the true Weave, which is something they are desperate to preserve. As such, the sharn seek to nurture and spread active pockets of Spellplague.

To achieve this end, the sharns guide the Order of Blue Fire—a strained relationship at best. The simple truth of the matter is that the sharns don't play well with others. They prefer to follow their own shifting agendas at their own chaotic pace.

Sharn Alignment

In an upcoming *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide* update, the sharn (page 266) will receive a revision in alignment to unaligned. This alters the plaguechanged sharns to the alignment they were always intended to have. Plaguechanged sharns are enigmatic and erratic, and they seek to spread the Spellplague, but they are no more evil than the Spellplague itself.

One might wonder why the sharn was ever published as chaotic evil. The answer to that weirdness lies in the early design for Fourth Edition, when we had a Chaotic alignment that meant "chaotic but not evil." I gave the plaguechanged sharns that alignment, because it made sense with their behavior. When the alignment system solidified, the sharn was then inadvertently switched to chaotic evil against the original design intent. The update and this sidebar correct that mistake.

—Chris Sims

Habitat

Sharn pools are typically underground in the Sharnlands and other regions of active Spellplague. A few of their kind, the eldest of the sharns alive today, remain as guardians living under the protective mythal of the Hidden City of Hope.

Rhymanthiin: The Hidden City of Hope stands as a testament to the fulfillment of Oacenth's Vow and Dragmar's Promise—a land where all goodly races of Faerûn can live and work together with common cause and unity. Nearly the size of Waterdeep, the streets and outer walls of Rhymanthiin are orderly, with clean lines and heavy block constructions. The great boulevards and defensive walls of the city have the black-as-pitch hue of the sharns, from which any of the three-mawed defenders can emerge. Rhymanthiin remains firmly anchored to the Feywild and invisible to most outsiders. Those who have not been welcomed into the city observe only miles of untamed wilderness where the city should stand.

Perhaps surprising to some, Rhymanthiin hosts the largest number of redeemed dark elves in all Faerûn, joining with their fey fellows to relearn the ancient traditions of their people. Sharns of Rhymanthiin stand apart from their kin in wider Faerûn. Untouched by the ravages of the Spellplague, they are one with the city, their bodies composing the streets and walls of the Hidden City of Hope.

The Sharnlands: In the Underdark, about 16 miles below the Gray Vale spreading southeast under the High Moor, lie the bizarre deeps known as the Sharnlands. These sprawling caverns, home to a great number of magical ley lines and earth nodes, run for miles through the deepest part of the Northdark.

Undermountain: In the depths of the Sargauth, below Halaster's Halls, lives a mysterious creature known as the Drowned Queen, an abolethlike being thought to have unusual magical abilities akin to those of the sharns. It is whispered that the Drowned Queen was responsible for the death of a Manshoon clone who sought to rule the Underhalls in the years following the Mad Mage's demise.

Plaguewrought Land: From the independent city of Ormpetarr, the Order of Blue Fire organizes Scar Pilgrimages into the Plaguewrought Land. Here, where the Spellplague is most active in all Faerûn, dozens of sharns dwell.

Halruaa: Much of the lore of Halruaa lives on within the few souls assimilated by the sharns before, during, and after that nation's destruction. Sharns are actively exploring the ruined capital of Halarahh in search of the *Zalathorm's Clockwork Sceptre*.

Sharn Variants

"Ye hearken, the three-souled-one shall lead them and the blasted heath shall impart wonders"

Sharn Blackclaw Powers

Sharn blackclaws are statistically identical to the sharn presented in the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide* (page 266), but they can command one or more alternative powers. You can choose any of the following replacement powers for the sharn presented in the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide*.

Plaguefire Maw

Substitute this power for the *leaping plaguefire* power.

Plaguefire Maw (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 2; three attacks, each against a different target within reach; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* Ongoing 5 fire damage and the target takes a –2 penalty to Will (save ends both). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* Ongoing 5 fire damage and the target takes a –2 penalty to Will (save ends both) and target contracts level 11 Halruaan Consumption (see *FRCG* page 136).

Spellfire Aegis

Substitute this power for the *second wind* power.

Column of Spellfire (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fire, Force**
Close burst 2; +17 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 5 fire and force damage. The sharn gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of its next turn. The sharn transforms into a 30-foot-high column of fire.

Bolt Barrage

Substitute this power for the *independent action* power.

Bolt Barrage ✦ **Force** (see text)
The sharn makes two ranged basic attacks against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target and all enemies adjacent to the target are knocked prone.

Hex Step

Substitute this power for the *threatening reach* power.

Hex Step (move; when adjacent to a *hex portal*; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The sharn teleports to any unoccupied square adjacent to a *hex portal* it created.

Psychic Displacement

Substitute this power for the *threatening reach* power.

Psychic Displacement (immediate interrupt, when the sharn is targeted by a melee or ranged attack; recharge @6) ✦ **Teleportation**
The sharn teleports 5 squares.

Swarming Hex Portals

Substitute this power for the *threatening reach* power.

Swarming *Hex Portals*
The sharn gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against targets that are adjacent to at least 2 *hex portals*.

Sharn Symbiote

Sharn symbiotes are horrifying serpents of black ooze that spend their days within the gooey confines of inky, black pools unless provoked. Symbiotes are the only method of procreation for a sharn colony, though the sharns are usually meticulous when selecting those deemed worthy to merge with their collective consciousness.

Graft: Sharn Symbiote

A sharn symbiote envelops the host from head to foot in an oily-black second skin, which shifts and writhes when agitated. A graft is a template that introduces new mechanics onto an existing creature. They function like templates, but do not alter the creature's level, nor do they make it elite, but they do make the creature slightly more complicated and a little more powerful.

Prerequisite: 10th level

Sharn Symbiote — **Graft**

Senses darkvision
Languages telepathy 15
Immune petrification, polymorph
Psychic Slam (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 5; level + 2 vs. Will; the target is immobilized until the end of the creature's next turn.

Sharn Symbiote Tactics

Sharn symbiotes immobilize prey that stray too close with *psychic slam*. If other sharns are not nearby to deal with the intruder, the symbiote uses *seize host* to compel the enemy to withdraw from sharn lands. Only as a last resort does a symbiote assimilate its host, which risks introducing unfavorable qualities into the collective.

Sharn Symbiote — **Level 15 Lurker**
Large aberrant magical beast (blind, ooze) — XP 1,200

Initiative +17 — **Senses** Perception +6; blindsight 10, tremorsense 10
HP 119; **Bloodied** 59
AC 29; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28
Immune gaze, petrification, polymorph
Speed 6

Slam (standard; at-will)
+20 vs. AC; 2d10 + 4 damage.

Seize Host (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
+18 (+20 against immobilized creatures) vs. Reflex; ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends) and the target is grabbed.

Assimilate (standard; at-will)
Targets a creature the sharn symbiote has grabbed; +18 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends).

Psychic Feast (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Targets the creature the sharn symbiote has grabbed; +18 vs. Will; 3d8 + 9 psychic damage, and the sharn symbiote regains 10 hit points.

Psychic Slam (standard; at-will)
Close blast 5; +18 vs. Will; the target is immobilized until the end of the sharn symbiote's next turn.

Host Before Symbiote (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a melee or ranged attack; at-will)
Requires a grabbed creature; the attack that triggered this interrupt targets a creature the sharn symbiote has grabbed instead.

Symbiotic Link
If a creature the sharn symbiote has grabbed is reduced to 0 hit points by either the *psychic feast* power or the ongoing damage from *seize host*, the creature gains the sharn symbiote graft, regains 10 hit points, and is dominated by the sharn symbiote (a condition that can be ended only by the Remove Affliction ritual).

Alignment Unaligned — **Languages** –
Skills Arcana +17, Insight +11, Religion +17
Str 21 (+12) — **Dex** 23 (+13) — **Wis** 8 (+6)
Con 23 (+13) — **Int** 21 (+12) — **Cha** 24 (+14)

Symbiote

Symbiotes invade or join with a host creature's body, granting the host certain benefits in exchange for great protection. In some cases, however, the symbiote is little better than a parasite leaching off a host body until the symbiote can locate another.

When a *symbiotic link* is established, the symbiote joins with the base creature. In game terms, a *symbiotic link* is a graft, which is a minitemplate that you add to an NPC or monster (*Open Grave* page 216). Not only does a symbiote introduce an interesting story and visual element to an NPC, but it also grants the NPC an extra attack.

Sharn Phaseblade

Sharn phaseblades are lurking horrors that deliver precision strikes with their signature black blades; each blade trails wisps of shadow in its deadly wake.

Sharn Phaseblade Tactics

A sharn phaseblade uses *phase distortion* to keep away from its enemies and boost its next round's worth of attacks while delivering melee attacks through strategically positioned *hex portals*.

Sharn Phaseblade **Level 16 Solo Lurker**
Large aberrant magical beast XP 7,000

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 586; **Bloodied** 293
Regeneration 10
AC 30; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Immune petrification, polymorph
Saving Throws +5 (+8 against fear effects, and against conditions that hinder movement); see also *independent consciousness*
Speed 4, fly 8 (hover); see also *phase distortion*
Action Points 2

Bite (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.

Phaseblade (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 psychic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Hex Portal (minor; sustain minor [see text]; at-will) ✦ **Conjuration**
Ranged 5; the sharn creates a hexagonal window of light that it can attack through as if it were in that portal's space. As a minor action, it can move one portal 4 squares. Portals don't block line of sight, line of effect, or enemy movement. A sharn can maintain up to three such portals at a time with a single minor action; it can close as many as it wishes with a free action.

Independent Action (standard; at-will)
The sharn makes two melee basic attacks. If a phaseblade and a bite hit the same target, that target is also dazed (save ends).

Phase Distortion (standard; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The sharn Phaseblade teleports 10 squares and gains insubstantial and phasing until the start of its next turn. Additionally, on its next turn the sharn Phaseblade gains a +3 bonus to attack rolls.

Double Actions
A sharn rolls initiative twice, gets two turns during a round, and has a full set of actions (standard, move, minor) on each turn. Each set of actions corresponds to a different consciousness. The sharn's ability to take immediate actions refreshes on each of its turns.

Independent Consciousness
A sharn automatically saves against the dazed and stunned conditions, and against charm effects that a save can end.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +18, Insight +12, Religion +18
Str 21 (+13) **Dex** 23 (+14) **Wis** 8 (+7)
Con 23 (+14) **Int** 21 (+13) **Cha** 24 (+15)
Equipment 3 kukris

Sharn Hexshadow **Level 19 Solo Skirmisher**
Large aberrant magical beast XP 12,000

Initiative +17 **Senses** Perception +13; special senses
HP 682; **Bloodied** 341
Regeneration 10
AC 35; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 34
Immune petrification, polymorph
Saving Throws +5 (+8 against fear effects, and against conditions that hinder movement)
Speed 4, fly 8 (hover)
Action Points 2

Bite (minor 1/turn; at-will)
+24 vs. AC; 2d4 + 6 damage.

Claw (standard; at-will)
+24 vs. AC; 3d6 + 6 damage, and the sharn shifts 2 squares after the attack.

Lightning Ball (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 5; two attacks, each against different targets; +22 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 6 lightning damage.

Hex Portal (minor; sustain minor [see text]; at-will) ✦ **Conjuration**
Ranged 5; the sharn creates a hexagonal window of light that it can attack through as if it were in that portal's space. As a minor action, it can move one portal 4 squares. Portals don't block line of sight, line of effect, or enemy movement. A sharn can sustain up to three such portals at a time with a single minor action; it can close as many as it wishes with a free action.

Hex Step (move; when adjacent to a *hex portal*; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
The sharn teleports to any unoccupied square adjacent to a *hex portal* it created.

Independent Action (standard; at-will)
The sharn makes two melee basic attacks. If a bite and claw hit the same target, that target is also dazed (save ends).

Shadow Hex (minor; not usable when bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Conjuration, Illusion**
The sharn creates a shadowy illusion of itself, which occupies a space exactly as though it were the sharn hexshadow. The sharn and its illusion are considered to both be the same creature, sharing the same hit point pool and the same abilities, and each one takes one of the sharn's turns each round. When a sharn is bloodied, its illusion vanishes immediately.

Double Actions
A sharn rolls initiative twice, gets two turns during a round, and has a full set of actions (standard, move, minor) on each turn. Each set of actions corresponds to a different consciousness. The sharn's ability to take immediate actions refreshes on each of its turns.

Independent Consciousness
A sharn automatically saves against the dazed and stunned conditions, and against charm effects that a save can end.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +18, Insight +12, Religion +18
Str 21 (+14) **Dex** 23 (+15) **Wis** 8 (+8)
Con 23 (+15) **Int** 21 (+14) **Cha** 24 (+16)

Sharn Hexshadow

Sharn hexshadows are masterful tacticians that can divide their forms to confuse prey and better position themselves for delivering deadly killing strikes enhanced by orbs of eldritch might.

Sharn Hexshadow Tactics

Sharn hexshadows employ *shadow hex* to confuse while unleashing crackling *lightning balls* and *independent actions* against their enemies.

About the Author

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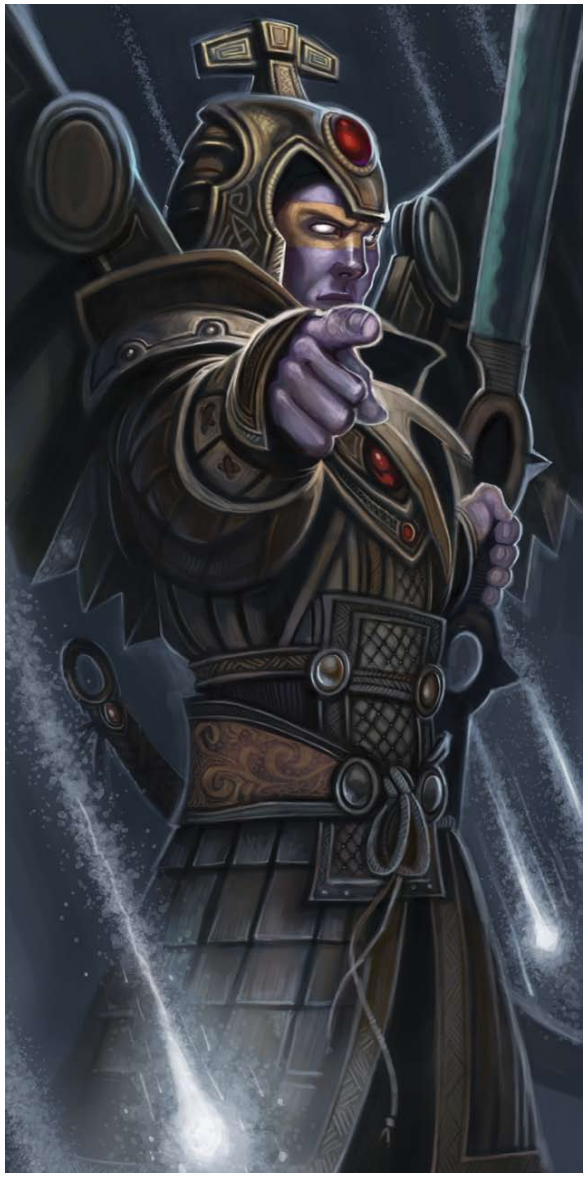
The Deva

BY JAMES WYATT

illustration by William O' Connor



In last month's column, I gave you an inside look into the back-and-forth within the R&D department—among designers, developers, editors, and managers—that led to the final form of the gnome and the half-orc in *Player's Handbook 2*®. This time around, I'm going to do the same thing for the deva—a "new" race that appears in *PH2* this month, but which is the spiritual descendant, as it were, of a different race: the aasimar.

Ah, the aasimar. Depending on how you pronounce it, they come off sounding either a bit mule-headed or totally full of awesome. I never really had a problem with the name—until a caption in *Races of Faerûn*™ doubled the S instead of the A. Even with that typo, though, I've always been fond of the race, in the same way that I've always enjoyed the concept of paladins and other holy characters. I don't mind an occasional walk on the dark side, but in general I like to play heroes who stand firmly on the side of right and truth and justice. The aasimar race lets me play a character who belongs there because of his nature, not just because of the moral choices he's made.

So that's been the guiding principle in my mind through the two years of conversations I'm going to sketch out in this column.

Scramjet (May to September 2006)

In the Scramjet phase of 4th Edition design (which was a team devoted to exploring and codifying the story of the D&D world), we found ourselves in a difficult position. For some good reasons, we had slowly but surely removed from the game any living embodiments of goodness in the cosmos. Aside from a handful of good gods, we had no cosmic champions of good. Angels became the servants of *all* the gods, not just the good ones. Archons, guardinals, and eladrin—the good-guy celestial races of 2nd and 3rd Editions—vanished with the Upper Planes they inhabited or got transformed into very different concepts. That left us without a clear story for the aasimar, who in the past had been the mirror image of the tiefling. Tieflings were descended from humans and devils, so it was easy to understand how they had a streak of supernatural evil in their heritage. With no celestial ancestors, what would make the aasimar inclined toward good?

The first idea we tossed around and wrote up was that aasimar were angels who disobeyed their divine masters by choosing to do what was good and right instead of what the gods commanded. That would make them angelic in origin, but firmly committed to good. Unfortunately, this concept relied pretty heavily on a notion that paladins might not use the divine power source—a notion that didn't survive long. We wanted aasimars to make great paladins, and that meant they had to be willing to subject themselves to divine authority.

So our next (and final) concept was that aasimar used to be angels of various deities, but they became mortal. Some aasimar grew fascinated with the natural world and begged their deities to allow them to join it; others were cast out of the Astral for offenses against their deities. Still others are on the mortal world for another reason—though many do not know what that reason is. Some were sent to live mortal lives as a chance to prove themselves and earn a promotion through the angelic ranks.

Aasimar, we decided, lived among humans but reincarnated. They looked just like attractive humans, but with golden eyes (and we had the idea

that the name aasimar was an Elven word that referred to those golden eyes), and over the course of their career we imagined that they might gain angelic wings, golden skin, or other distinguishing features.

Some aasimar, we said, have random flashbacks of their previous lives and their existence as angels. This is a huge story element for players and DMs to play with, but there might also be mechanics that allow an aasimar character to benefit from vestigial knowledge or skills.

It amuses me now to look back on this and realize how close to full circle we came. But it was a circuitous path!

Monster Manual Design (October 2006 to April 2007)

The Scramjet description of aasimar didn't catch hold right away. I know that for me, it lacked the key thing that made aasimar worth playing—that they have goodness running through their veins. Bill Slavicsek made it clear that he wanted a race that was the opposite of tieflings. Furthermore, he said, "When we get around to it, this race should get a visual makeover as we did with the tieflings so that they have a look and feel all their own. We will also continue to debate this name and whether or not to change it."

By this point it was clear that this race would not end up in the first *Player's Handbook*. So the pressure was off, a little bit—except that as I led the *Monster Manual*® design team, I figured they should appear in that book. So I continued trying to hammer away at an origin story that would make them inherently inclined toward goodness. Since there were no celestials for them to be descended from, I landed on the idea of using celestial as the name of the race, and crafted this story for them:

On the great astral mountain called Celestia, three gods of good alignment reside together (with their not-so-good colleague, Kord). Bahamut is sometimes called the ruler of this realm, but in truth the four deities rule as equals over a domain of peace and justice. Pelor resides in a shining palace at its peak, Kord wanders its lowest slopes, and Moradin mines and smelts in the forge-furnaces at the mountain's heart. This heavenly domain is also the home of the celestials.

In an age long past and nearly forgotten, a great human kingdom shone in the darkness of the world as a perfect example of a just society. The rulers of this empire were among the holiest of mortals, as devoted to the principles of good as they were to the worship of Pelor and Bahamut. Knights of Bahamut rode through the land to maintain justice and order, and their priests offered daily sacrifices in grand temples dedicated to the four celestial gods.

So greatly did this kingdom please the gods of Celestia that they would not allow it to fall. When a great horde gathered at its border and began to sweep over its lands, Bahamut elevated the kingdom's capital city of Empyrea to the slopes of Celestia. The citizens of that shining city thus survived the destruction of their kingdom, and their descendants gradually changed their essential nature as the astral energies of Celestia infused their bodies and souls. They are now the race of celestials: humans whose essential nature is infused with holiness.

Wizards Presents: Races and Classes

In an essay he wrote for the first 4th Edition preview book, Rob Heinsoo summed up another challenge we faced in turning the aasimar into a compelling race: the "Ave Maria problem."

Celestials

If you're a long-time D&D fan, odds are that you've already noticed that the tieflings' promotion to first-rank player character race has left another race behind. The race that was the tieflings' light-side counterpart, a race of golden humans descended from angels—the aasimar.

Even now I struggle to type that word without spelling it like buttocks.

I'm one of the designers who argued that we should stop using the word "aasimar." In the aasimar's place, you'll meet a race of celestials who have plunged through the same transforming fires as the tieflings.

I won't lie: Making Good-associated creatures as exciting as their Evil-curious counterparts is a challenge. I call the challenge the "Ave Maria" problem, a reference to Walt Disney's original *Fantasia*, a wonderful animated film that ended with musical meditations on Evil and Good. Evil got *Night on Bald Mountain*, accompanied by an evil-storm orchestrated by a whip-wielding demon. Good followed up with barely animated candle-bearing keepers of the faith proceeding across the screen singing *Ave Maria*. It's a sweet piece of music, and it certainly speaks to the possibilities of Good, but the animation just didn't hold a candle to lightning storms on Bald Mountain.

So now you know our mission: Celestials who sizzle bright enough to hold their own against Bald Mountain lightning storms. We're working on it!

The Story Team Comes Full Circle

Well, the celestial didn't end up in the *Monster Manual*—not least, I think, because we didn't have enough time to really hash out their story (not to mention their look) while working to get the first three core books finished. But when design work for *PH2* started up in earnest, what was at the time called the story team—me (as Lead Story Designer), Rich Baker, Bruce Cordell, Chris Sims, and Matt Sernett—put our heads together on the issue of the celestial/aasimar.

The rest of the team was not sold on the celestial name. I think Chris Sims was the one who proposed "deva." I know I had some hesitation—partly because of its roots in Indian language and religion, and partly because it's easily mispronounced to sound like either an opera singer or someone who acts like one. (Say it with me now, "DAY-vah." Much better.) But when we came up with a story that not only echoed the Scramjet tale of angels but also linked this race to the rakshasas, I think we all knew we'd struck gold.

The key difference from the original Scramjet story was that devas were once angels who were dedicated to the gods of good—Bahamut, Pelor, and Moradin. They're not a generic "here's what happens when angels decide to become mortal" race, they're a specific instance of a group of good angels entering the world. As long as they remain devoted to goodness, their lives in the world can go just fine. But a corrupted deva is a terrible thing—when a deva falls too far, he or she is reborn as a rakshasa.

We made sure to get a note in the *Monster Manual* before it went to the printers suggesting a greater mystery to the reincarnative cycle of the rakshasa than we were really saying, leaving the door open for the deva in *PH2*. And we finally had what I wanted all along: a race as deeply infused with goodness as the tiefling is steeped in evil. Like the tiefling, their alignment isn't hard-coded, but a lot of the interest in playing a deva character is in dealing with those impulses that pull you against your deepest nature.

The Look

Finding a look for the deva was *much* harder than settling on their story. Scramjet, as we've seen, proposed that they looked just like the humans among whom they were born, except with golden eyes. Bill wanted us to do a significant reconcepting of their appearance, though, just like we did with the tiefling, and that ended up taking place in several stages.

In February 2007, Bruce Cordell was working on an art order for a miniatures set and thought he was going to put a celestial in it. Bruce, Matt Sernett, and I talked for a while about what they should look like and came up with a few goals and suggestions that I ran past Bill:

The first goal is to create a distinctive appearance that will be communicated clearly in miniatures, so when you have a celestial miniature it doesn't just look like a human paladin. The second goal is to communicate their essentially good nature.

✦ Maybe they have feathery wings. Aside from halos, that's about the only feature that resonates as viscerally as diabolic horns, tails, and hooves for the tieflings. They could have small wings or large but nonfunctional wings, and either way they could get the ability to fly by 10th level.

✦ Maybe they have metallic golden skin. That might be hard to convey in miniatures, but could look cool in art.

✦ Maybe they have translucent golden-colored bodies. These could make really cool miniatures, similar to the elemental archons, translucent yellow plastic with armor painted over. Maybe they also use weapons made of crystal substances, or we paint the weapons too.

Those ideas didn't get very far, and a celestial mini didn't make it into that set. Chris Sims made a good point about metallic skin:

"From a visual design standpoint, I still think it's a bad idea to make them have gold or any sort of metallic skin, although silvery would be marginally acceptable. Human beings find a metallic look inhuman in a bad way. Think about Raistlin with his gold skin. Not attractive. These beings should be *very, very* attractive—as attractive as rakshasas are beastly. We do need to differentiate them physically from elves and eladrins, so I recommend a pale and shimmering (in a supermodel/internal light sort of way) look with metallic hair and eyes, rather than metallic skin. The skin could have an inhuman cast, such as blue or tan with a sheen. I also recommend that they be taller and bulkier than even humans, and almost always perfect physical specimens except when corrupted."

In July, 2008, it was time to come up with an answer so the deva in *PH2* could move forward. Rob Heinsoo, art director Jon Schindehette, and I sat down and hashed out what we wanted. At Jon's request, I put together a document that would serve as guidance for the concept artist he had lined up, so I summed up everything I knew about the deva story and made up a lot of stuff. This document follows the format of similar concept art orders we've done for **Magic: The Gathering**® creatures, and it seems to have done the trick.

In order to pull it together, I spent hours going through images on the web, in *Spectrum* (an annual collection of the best in fantasy art), and past D&D books. I realized just how difficult a task Chris Sims had set out for us. I outlined the problem under "Rough Description" below.

This document was what got us to the look you'll see when *Player's Handbook 2* releases—a long way from the aasimar of old, but ready to take its place as a champion of good in your D&D game!

Deva Concept

Devas are a race imbued with the essence of goodness. If the tiefling is a race that gets to flirt with the dark side, the deva is its conceptual opposite—it manages to be simultaneously goody-goody and badass.

This is the race for the player who wants to be the good guy without any shame, who wants to resist temptation and take the moral high ground—seize it with a greatsword, if need be. I would describe devas as "angelic," except that it's no longer true (in D&D) that angels embody the forces of good.

Rough Description

Devas need to be humanoid and probably very human-looking. They should be beautiful—as beautiful as we can make them while retaining some features that make them look not exactly human. This is the key challenge to defining the look of this race: There are only so many ways you can alter the human form and keep it attractive, and most or all of those ways have been done before.

We *don't* want to take them in a fey or elfin direction, which would make them step on our elves, eladrin, and other fey races.

We should consider wings. They could be small, nonfunctional versions of metallic angel wings. Or they could be wing-shaped fans of light that extend behind them (though that would require that these minis always use transparent plastic). But without wings, it's hard to look like an angel.

We can play with skin color and texture, and other elements of coloration. Colors that take them far from the human norm would be good—blue, yellow, metallic gold or bronze, translucent gemstone skin, and so on. I would prefer *not* to make them shining white.

Environment

Devas don't have a society of their own. They live among other races, primarily humans. Their own homes are simple and elegant.

Cultural Details

Devas are reincarnated when they die, and appear in their new bodies as adults. They live among other races, but preserve elements of their own ancient culture—even if they never meet another deva in the course of a lifetime. This culture is expressed primarily in dress, religion, and eating habits.

Devas strive for perfection—they believe that part of the purpose of their reincarnation is to achieve perfection in every aspect of life.

Religion Details

Devas were once angels or angel-like immortals who decided to live in the world rather than live directly in the presence of the gods. They still worship the good gods—Bahamut, Moradin, and Pelor—but they don't put a lot of stock in temples and priests. They worship the gods at meals in their homes, setting an empty place for the absent gods.

Character Classes

Though they don't see priests as important, deva adventurers are commonly clerics, paladins, and other classes that use the divine power source. They're all about a personal, immediate connection to the deity, and the divine power source is a clear reflection of that kind of connection.

Devas that don't use the divine power source are most often defenders or leaders, protecting or inspiring their adventuring companions.

Favored Weapons

Swords, spears and other polearms, maces. Metal parts should be shiny and might be golden, bronze, or very silver. Avoid dark gunmetal.

Favored Materials

Shiny metal, polished wood, alabaster, marble. High-gloss, polished look.

Clothing Details

I'd like to see clothing ideas that borrow from Japan and India. Fine silk, flowing clothes, shiny metal armor. Simple, elegant jewelry with polished metal and bright gems.

Let's explore headdresses, crowns, ornaments that suggest halos or the energy-hair of angels.

Socialization Details

Devas are refined and polite, and they follow the highest moral standards, but they are not afraid of violence. They believe that the pursuit of good is an eternal war with the forces of evil, which are embodied in demons, rakshasas, devils, and evil gods with their angels.

Magic and Martial Arts

Devas use divine magic almost by nature, but they're equally competent with arcane and psionic arts. Some devas are dedicated warriors in gleaming armor with shining swords.

About the Authors

James Wyatt is the D&D® Design Manager for Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying R&D. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*®. He was one of the designers of the *Eberron® Campaign Setting* and is the author of several Eberron novels.

The Primal Power Source

BY JAMES WYATT, MIKE MEARLS, AND ROB HEINSOO

illustration by Steve Ellis

James: Once again I delve back into old files on my computer, grateful that I never throw anything away (and that my hard drive is large enough to support that habit). It's interesting for me to realize the extent to which many of the foundational concepts of *Player's Handbook 2* were designed at the same time as those in the first PH. Here are some of the first words about the primal power source that were set down and intended to stick, from December 2006:

> *Primal powers* draw strength from the natural world. Many of the powers have a strong connection to something in nature, such as a totem animal or a natural source of power (such as a deep forest, a volcano, or a storm). Classes using this power source include barbarians, druids, and beastmasters.

We knew early on that we didn't want druids to be just "the clerics of nature gods," the way they were in 2nd Edition. Because clerics and paladins can serve any god, druids had to be something else. To define that "something else," we went back to some old sources. This month's D&D Alumni column talks a bit about the history of the druid class in the game, and its incarnation in the 1st Edition AD&D *Player's Handbook* gave us some hints of inspiration:

> Druids can be visualized as medieval cousins of what the ancient Celtic sect of Druids would have become had it survived the Roman conquest. They hold trees (particularly oak and ash), the sun, and the moon as deities. Mistletoe is the holy symbol of druids, and it gives power to their spells. They have an obligation to protect trees and wild plants, crops, and to a lesser extent, their human followers and animals. Thus, druids will never destroy woodlands or crops no matter what the circumstances. Even though a woods, for example, were evilly hostile, druids would not destroy it, although nothing would prevent them from changing the nature of the place if the desire and wherewithal existed. In similar fashion, they avoid slaying wild animals or even domestic ones except as necessary for self-preservation and sustenance.

This sets up the idea of druids as priests of a religion that's fundamentally different from the faith of clerics, the worship of the pantheon of gods. They don't worship Pelor the sun god – they hold the sun itself as a deity. That's a subtle difference, but it proved to be a fruitful one for us.

Mike: Often when we work on something like the divide between primal and divine power, the answer is already in the game's roots. We just have to look for them!

The village of Hommlet, from both the eponymous adventure module and the later *Temple of Elemental Evil* supermodules, gave us a great starting point. Hommlet features both a newly built church to St. Cuthbert and a grove of trees tended by Jaroo the druid. Jaroo and many of the villagers follow the old faith, while St. Cuthbert's followers are newcomers to the area.

We liked the idea of two faiths that, in some ways, compete with each other. On one hand you have worship of the gods, on the other you have the beliefs and practices of the druids and the primal power source. The line between temple and grove, the way of the gods and the way of the spirits, was an interesting one to explore.

Understanding that not every great power had to flow from the gods was an important step. It led us to the idea that primal magic arose among the people of the world first, while the gods and primordials were busy battling for control of the cosmos. If the gods were a force for the astral and the primordials a power of the Elemental Chaos, the primal spirits filled a similar role for the world.

Once we had that framework built, it was easy to see where the primal classes, the barbarian and druid to start with, fit in.

James: Associating the barbarian with the druid gave us the foundation of the primal power source. Mike talked a bit about that in the *Wizards Presents: Races and Classes* book published in 2007:

Rage is the heart of every barbarian, and that's still true in 4E. With the increased customization in the game, barbarians now have several varieties of rage to choose from. We've also tied barbarians and druids closer together, creating a relationship between them similar to the link between paladins and clerics. If a paladin is the sword of the faith, the barbarian is nature's fury given physical form.

We wanted the barbarian to be more than a fighter who rages, and to that end we firmly pushed weapon tricks and mastery into the fighter's realm. Barbarians still heft axes and mauls with the best of them, but they now have access to feral, totemic abilities that make them unique.

Early on, we had the idea that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the primal classes was that they involved some form of transformation, alterations of self that were more nature-based or possibly cyclical than the polymorph effects used by 3E wizards.

Rob: Early on, we had the idea that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the primal classes was that they involved some form of transformation, alterations of self that were more nature-based or possibly cyclical than the polymorph effects used by 3E wizards. The druid obviously points that direction. We wanted the druid to be the first class that played in two different forms, using one group of powers in beastform and another group of powers while walking on two legs.

Barbarian rages push the transformation theme. They're the biggest powers a barbarian has, so they are daily powers. And they push the barbarian into a different magical and emotional state, an altered self that is tougher or faster or stronger, surrounded by primal spirits or embodying the rage of a primal beast or force of nature.

The transformation angle guided me when I was figuring out what we wanted from the warden, the entirely new primal defender. When the warden uses her guardian form powers, she transforms into a hybrid creature, a form that mixes her normal form with a beast or ancestor or nature spirit. It's supposed to look intimidating, to help the warden function as a better defender and offer powers the warden doesn't have in their normal form, including a new attack.

Then we created the shaman ... and stepped away from the transformation theme! Shamans function so differently from every other class that adding a transformation element to what was already a full class concept didn't make sense. Plenty of shaman powers have minor transformative aspects, but there's no single transformative theme in the shaman, except for the very subtle way in which shaman at-will and encounter powers change the effect the shaman's spirit companion has on creatures adjacent to it. That's a subtle dynamic that creates a round-by-round shift in the shaman's spirit companion's effect on the game, but it doesn't compare with the true transformations common in the other primal classes.

James: Part of defining the primal power source was defining what it's opposed to. The 1st Edition PH talked about druids protecting plants, crops, people, and animals, and refraining from doing harm to those things. It went on to suggest that druids were the enemies of those who harm those things. In my experience, that led to players feeling like druids had to oppose the people who

clear away the forest to build cities or stalk hunters through the forest, turning them into a pseudomedieval extremist sect of Greenpeace.

The 2nd Edition *Player's Handbook* steered away from that:

Druids recognize that all creatures (including humans) need food, shelter, and protection from harm. Hunting, farming, and cutting lumber for homes are logical and necessary parts of the natural cycle. However, druids do not tolerate unnecessary destruction or exploitation of nature for profit.

I think it was Rob who went off on a tirade at my cube about the anachronism of turning primal characters into modern-day environmentalists. In a world with no Industrial Revolution, he argued, civilization on any normal scale isn't a threat to the natural world that druids should be concerned about. The forces that druids should be opposed to aren't the priests and paladins of Erathis colonizing the wilds and cutting down trees to build their cities. Rather, they're the forces that literally seek to destroy the world.

In *D&D*, those forces are many. They're the demons of the Abyss. They're the warped and twisted aberrant monstrosities of the Far Realm, whose very existence corrupts the natural world and threatens to undo the laws of nature. They're the undead who violate the natural cycle of life and death. Those are the enemies of primal characters — and that led us to a clearer understanding of who those characters are.

Rob: James said I could put the rant he's talking about into my own words, but hearing how you sound to other people is more fun than re-ranting. But now that James introduced the topic, I'll go a bit deeper.

One of the core assumptions of the 4e world is that there are a few scattered regions of civilization (points of light) surrounded by dangerous darkness. The primal people tinker with those definitions a bit. The areas that the primal people think of as points of light look like darkness to more civilized people who need walls to keep them safe. The basic dynamic of scattered areas of relative safety surrounded by unknown areas Where Monsters Dwell remains the same. There's no guarantee that primal people who move into a new area will survive, but one of the consequences of the points-of-light world is that there is no guarantee that any settled area will survive for long.

The *Primal Power* sourcebook will have more detail on the connections between primal tribes and the civilized folk they move around or among. For that matter, *Primal Power* will talk a bit about primal tribes, about the various ways they interact with the spirits, and the fact that some tribes include members of many different races.

Leave them be, and they'll leave you be. Mess with them, and they're liable to take a bite out of your hide.

As James mentioned, the common element between the primal classes and the primal people is that they're opposed to the creatures and forces that would destroy the world. An idea that Mike had while working on PH2 really helped bring this idea together. Mike realized that at some point, the gods had been part of the problem that the primal spirits moved to correct.

Mike: Yeah, the idea of druids as simply praying to different gods always seemed a little lame. Riffing off the inspiration provided by Hommlet, I liked the idea of the gods and primal spirits butting heads.

The way I saw it, you had the primordials and the gods bashing each other over the head. Meanwhile, the world is stuck in the middle. If the primal spirits arose from that world and are part of it, they probably don't particularly like either side of that conflict. When you come down to it, both sides of the battle felt that the winner would rule the universe. The primal spirits begged to differ.

In our conception of the primal spirits, they are true forces of nature, answerable to no one, neither truly good nor truly evil, but rather concerned with maintaining the natural order of things. If those pesky gods and meddling primordials would just leave everything alone, nature would take care of itself. The march of seasons, the cycle of life and death, all of those are necessary components to ensure that the mechanisms of nature function smoothly. Death ensures that the press of living things never overwhelms the world. The seasons march to keep life in check and to ensure that no one type of life overruns the world.

If the gods have their own, highly focused agendas (as embodied by their spheres of influence), the primal spirits are all aspects of the totality of the natural world. Leave them be, and they'll leave you be. Mess with them, and they're liable to take a bite out of your hide.

While the war between the gods and primordials raged, the primal spirits stepped in when the war threatened to overrun or destroy the world. In essence, the gods and primordials were politely,

then firmly, and finally violently asked to take their battle elsewhere. When the gods won, the spirits acknowledged that they would play a role in the world, but they're still ready to unleash their wrath if any planar power goes too far in exerting its influence over the world.

That's in part why you don't see epic tier threats romping around the world. They keep to the planes, because a god, primordial, or other epic creature that starts crushing swaths of the world is liable to be eaten by the World Serpent. The primal spirits are content to let them mess around in the planes, but if they venture into the world, they had better keep quiet, stay out of trouble, and leave when asked.

Rob: As we'll show in *Primal Power*, the ordinary situation in the world doesn't put the pantheon of the gods and the way of the primal spirits into conflict. Their conflict occurred in mythological time and created the current order of the world, something that most of the gods and the spirits are fine with. Of course, the Far Realm and the Abyss are not satisfied with the order of things, and the pantheon of the gods and the spirits of the primal way are usually more or less in agreement about how those threats should be destroyed. *Primal Power* will have more to say about how the pantheon of the gods and the spirits of the primal way relate with each other.

James: Building on all this foundation, here's what I wrote for the introduction to *Player's Handbook 2*, explaining the myth of the primal spirits and their role in the world:

According to legend, when the gods made war against the primordials at the dawn of time, the battles raged across the cosmos for uncounted centuries. The gods slowly gained an upper hand, successfully imprisoning or banishing many of the primordials. However, this war threatened the very existence of the world, as the primordials who brought it forth from the Elemental Chaos clashed with the gods who sought to fix the form of the world in permanence. In the last days of the war, a new force made itself known in the cosmos: the spiritual expression of the world itself. These primal spirits declared an end to the war, asserting that the world would no longer be a battleground for the two opposing forces. The gods and primordials were banished to their home planes, and the primal spirits of the world decreed a balance: The world would remain a place where matter and spirit mingled freely, where life and death proceeded in an orderly cycle, where the seasons changed in their unending wheel without interference. The gods and primordials could still influence the world, but they could not rule it. These primal spirits are beyond number, ranging from spirits too weak to have proper names to the mightiest incarnations of nature's power: the Primal Beast, the Fate Weaver, the Great Bear, the World Serpent, and others. They are spirits of winds and weather, of predators and prey, of plains and forests, of mountains and swamps. As the people of the world have come to know these primal spirits and live in harmony with them, some mortal spirits have joined their number after death, just as some mortal souls pass to the dominions of their gods. These great ancestors are among the most potent of the primal spirits.

About the Authors

James Wyatt is the *D&D* Design Manager for Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying R&D. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition *D&D* and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. He was one of the designers of the *Eberron Campaign Setting* and is the author of several *Eberron* novels.

Rob Heinsoo led the design of the 4th Edition *D&D* Roleplaying Game. His 4th Edition design credits include *Martial Power* and the *Forgotten Realms Player's Guide*. His other game designs include *Three-Dragon Ante* and *Inn-Fighting*.

Mike Mearls is the Lead Designer for the *Dungeons & Dragons* roleplaying game. His recent credits include H1: *Keep on the Shadowfell* and *Player's Handbook II*.

Hail to the Player-in-Chief: Part 2

BY SHELLY MAZZANOBLE
illustrations by William O'Conner

"What's that smell?" Peter asked from the other side of the cubicle. "It's like . . ." he sniffed loudly "Thai food."

There was no response and there was certainly no Thai food. At least not on my new desk in R&D.

Peter popped his head over the wall "It's coming from you!" he shouted. "Why are you down here eating lemongrass chicken at 9:30 in the morning?" he asked.

"It's Ginger Soufflé," I told him. "It's my moisturizer."

"Do you always smell like that?" Stephen Radney-MacFarland asked. "Because if so, please limit your visits down here until after 12:00. You're making me hungry."

Limit my visits? Stephen must not have checked his email yet. Or maybe Bill wanted to make a special announcement. I'm glad I dressed up today and wore the expensive moisturizer.

"Yes," I said, "I probably will smell like this on most days. It's my favorite scent. But I'm not exactly visiting, you know. I work here."

"What's this?" Stephen asked, poking at the tin-foil dome I left on my would-be desk.

"Chocolate bunt cake" I said. "Kind of a desk-warming treat, I guess." I didn't mention that it's them who should be warming my desk and not me. No reason to start off on the wrong foot here.

My first morning as the newly appointed Player-in-Chief was not nearly as productive as I had hoped. Mostly because my former boss kept calling me back to my old desk and making me attend meetings and answer the emails of my old self. I cut her some slack, knowing this change happened rather quickly. I agreed to help her out but only for a couple of days.

"Help me out?" she asked.

"I know. Gracious, isn't it?" I confirmed. "I wish I could do more but The People have been without a voice for too long. Got to go!"

"Hey!" she shouted after me. "Where are you going with my plants?"

And with that I headed back to R&D, determined not to let my first day be a total wash. Change was in the air! And it smelled like Ginger Soufflé.

My new team in R&D spends a lot of time talking to each other. I guess this is part of their jobs. They volley random stats back and forth, theorize, hypothesize, and reminisce. I find Peter and Chris Perkins sitting at the round table positioned for these kinds of conversations. I join them.

"Whose stuff is that on the empty desk?" Chris asked.

"Mine," I answered, slicing off two hunks of cake and sliding paper plates in each of their directions.

"She thinks she works here now," Peter said. "In R&D."

I sensed some intimidation coming from Peter, which was understandable. He's young. He'll learn. And if not, I'll take him out in kickboxing class.

"Speaking of working," I said. "Let's get started. I need to go over some proposed rules changes with you. On behalf of the players, of course."

"Of course," Chris said.

Collectively, Chris and Peter have been playing *D&D* longer than I've been alive—30 years and 15 years respectively.

I had a lot of changes to make before lunch, so I moved on. I'd come back to this later.

"And how long have you been playing?" Peter asked me.

"Four years," I answered. "But I think that's an advantage. I have a fresh perspective. I'm almost a clean slate. The Player-in-Chief needs to represent everyone. Even the fresh-faced newbies."

"Good cake," Chris said. "You're hired."

That's stating the obvious,s but I thanked him anyway. "So why don't I tell you some of my development ideas?"

"Oh boy," Chris said.

"Can't wait," Peter said.

Apathy is a transparent mask for insecurity. I felt for them. I did.

"Let's start with die-ties," I said. "Just like in kickball, where the tie goest to the runner, in *D&D*, the tie should go to the player."

I cited the example that comes up almost every time we play where New DM asks if 17 hits Tabitha's Armor Class.

"Nope!" I will say. "It ties her armor class. Phew! Dodged that bullet!"

He then goes on to tell me that I'm taking 12 points of damage, which I grudgingly deduct on my character sheet. If Tabitha ends up dying, I will contest it.

"The number on your character sheet is the number needed to hit you," Peter said.

Well, duh, Peter. Even I know that.

"So it doesn't tie," Chris elaborated. "It hits."

"Well, it shouldn't hit. 18 and above should hit Tabitha. 17 should miss."

"That would make your Armor Class 18," Peter said.

"Right," I said. Jeez, as smart as these guys are supposed to be, they seemed to have a hard time grasping simple math concepts. "That's what I'm saying."

"So if your Armor Class was 18, then 18 would hit you," Chris said.

"18 would be a tie!" I said. They must be so intimidated they couldn't think straight. "19 would hit."

"No," Peter said. "Next question."

I had a lot of changes to make before lunch, so I moved on. I'd come back to this later.

"Everyone should have the chance to reroll. Especially when you miss on your daily."

"Some races have that ability," Peter said.

"It's what makes them special," Chris said, reminding me that he used to be a teacher.

"Well bully for the special races," I said. "Maybe some benefits are better than others and therefore not fair at all. Ever think of that?" *No, I bet they hadn't.*

"If the ability to reroll is so important to you, then play an elf," Peter suggested.

"Astrid was an elf, and she couldn't do that," I said. "Do you have any idea how many times she let her party down by rolling a 1?"

"Who's Astrid?" Peter asked.

"She works in HR," Chris said, laughing.

Oh no he didn't! "No, she doesn't!" I corrected. "She is a retired adventurer but one of the finest in her time."

"Rolling all those 1s?" Peter asked. "Doesn't sound like it."

If only I had a *magic missile* in my pocket . . .

"Look, if you're so concerned about stepping on the toes of elves, why not just give them a different unique ability, like *good memory* or *well groomed*, and give the ability to re-roll to the rest of us?"

Peter made a buzzing sound as if I picked the wrong door on *The Price is Right*.

"Or how about our elven friends can use their special ability on another party member?"

Peter and Chris look at each other with raised eyebrows. "That's not *terrible*," Chris said. "I mean, comparably."

Peter nodded in agreement. "It could be a racial feat for elves."

"Great," I said. "You can post an update on the website, say, tomorrow?"

"Maybe not that soon," Chris said. "We should probably do a little more research first."

Details.

"Fine. Let's move on to the Soap Opera Effect."

"Do we have to?" Peter asked.

I sliced off another hunk of cake and slid it toward Peter.

I always thought there were remarkable similarities between game developers and soap opera

writers. Both rely on villains and heroes, lush backgrounds and backstories, and several characters coming together to tell one story.

"You should employ more soap opera tactics in regular game play, such as if you have a particularly bad encounter where, say, your character dies, you can use the new encounter power *I just had the strangest dream* and—"

"Pretend it never happened," Peter interrupted. He must have already been working on this.

"Exactly! You'll be good as new."

"Everyone in the party has to pretend it was a dream?" Chris asked.

"If they want to, I guess."

"So we are to assume that while your friends were fighting for their lives, you were conked out in a corner snoozing?" Peter asked.

"Not necessarily."

"And what about experience points?" Chris wanted to know. "You didn't fight, but they have to share them with you?"

"No, I mean, maybe —"

"Freeloader!" Peter accused. "You just want to kick back and reap the benefits of everyone else's hard work?"

"You're like a professor with tenure," said Chris.

"I'm not a freeloader! My character has never slept through an encounter! It was just a ... suggestion."

But even without their unfounded accusations, I can see why it's not a very good one. It's like when a contestant wins immunity on *Top Chef*. All of their teammates know they're either going to slack off in the elimination challenge or go totally off the rails and take the opportunity to try out an eel curry custard.

"How about power naps?" I asked. "Everyone knows you only need 20 minutes to feel fully recharged."

"Then you'd have one encounter after encounter," Chris explained.

Of course, Peter agreed. "Yeah, when would you have time to prepare a magic item, or eat dinner, or flirt with a barmaid at the tavern?"

I'm not much for flirting with waitresse's but maybe they have a point. Or maybe I'm just exhausted from being verbally tag-teamed by these two rules snobs. "I can see you do put some thought into the rules."

"How kind of you to notice," Peter said.

"Oh darn," Chris said, getting up from the table. "It's time for my root canal. Got to go!"

"I'll set up a meeting for tomorrow," I told him. "We still have to talk about the hairstyle generator for the Character Builder."

"Thanks for the cake," Peter said. "See you in kickboxing."

You can't trudge through a dungeon with a garment bag over your shoulder.

There's no shortage of rules-makers within my sight. And to think they sit at their desks like everyone else, diet sodas to their left, mouse pads emblazoned with pictures of their kids on the right. I have often wondered what Mike Mearls is staring at on his computer screen, because every time I walk by, he appears to be smiling. It's not until three minutes into our conversation that I begin to suspect, *he's just a nice guy who smiles a lot*. But that can't be! Mike Mearls is responsible for some major oversights, and he will not get away with it!

"As you know, I'm the newly elected Player-in-Chief," I began. "I have some issues to bring to your attention.

"Sounds great!" he said—much more enthusiastically than Peter and Chris, I might add.

"How about putting more emphasis on shopping. You have no idea what kind of skill goes into being a good consumer. Especially if you're trying to outfit a new adventurer on a paltry starting salary."

"Interesting," Mike said. "So what kinds of skills and mechanics should be associated with being a good shopper?"

"Just like real life: Diplomacy, Perception, Will, Fortitude . . . . Do you know how many perfectly good items I say no to on a daily basis? That is not easy."

"I imagine," Mike said.

"And accessorizing," I continued. "Who knows how long your encounter is going to take. You can't trudge through a dungeon with a garment bag over your shoulder. But just a few key accessories could convert your daytime adventuring gear to evening wear."

"I had no idea," Mike said. "How would you incentivize the players to pay more attention to their accessories?"

"Well, looking good would probably boost their Charisma."

"Of course!"

"And maybe if they weren't so quick just to rush into the first store and pick up the first adventurer's kit they see, they might find a much better deal a few stores down."

"Men aren't very patient when it comes to shopping," he agreed. "How would you encourage them to slow down and check out all the options?"

"Gift with purchase!" I said. "I won't buy my eye cream unless I'm getting a free lipstick with it."

"Or what if they knew they were getting judged on their wardrobe like on *Project Runway*?" Mike said.

"Yes!" I shouted. Mike totally got it. "Wait. *Project Runway*?"

"My wife . . ." he answered.

I could dish on *Project Runway* for hours, but I still have that bone to pick.

"I have a serious question for you," I warned. "How come Astrid isn't on the cover of *Player's Handbook 2*? Is there a more famous sorceress?"

Mike nodded. "Yes! We made Charisma very, very important, which is, of course, a testament to Astrid's personality."

I was so proud I might have burst. Does it help or hurt your credibility if you burst out crying at a co-workers desk? I left before we found out. Stephen Radney-MacFarland has given himself the title of "the nicest guy in R&D," which is a pretty bold statement, considering his cohorts. I had yet to see any evidence to back it up. I mean, my desk wasn't cleaned off, and he hadn't even welcomed me to the team. In fact, he asked me six times what I was doing loitering by his desk.

I'd like to incorporate a rule that anytime a player is caught texting, talking, surfing, or updating Facebook via iPhone, the DM has the option to drop a chandelier on their head as an interrupt action.

"Astrid?" he asked.

"She's the new girl in HR," Peter said, as he walked by with a menu for take-out Thai.

"No she's not. She's my sorceress."

"Oh, right. Astrid. Um . . . that's a good question," he said thoughtfully. "Actually, James picked the artwork. Take it up with him." He pointed to James Wyatt, who happened to be walking by.

"I did no such thing," James said. "Blame Rob." That was totally unfair, because Rob wasn't even at his desk to defend himself.

No one was fessing up. We stared at each other like someone had cast a Silence ritual.

Finally Mike spoke. "Clearly it was an oversight. We're very sorry."

"I'm sure you incorporated elements of her when designing the new sorcerers, right?" I asked.

If he really was the nicest guy in R&D, then certainly he'd be amenable to changing up some of the rules. For The People, of course.

"You know how Snuffleupagus always called Big Bird 'Bird' because he didn't think Big Bird was so big?" I asked.

"No."

No? Wow. I figured that out when I was 7.

"Well, *magic missile* used to be Astrid's favorite spell, because she could basically stand behind a column filing her nails, throw a couple of missiles over her shoulder, and clean house."

"Who's Astrid?"

"Gah! What's wrong with you guys? Whatever. What's up with having to roll to see if *magic missile* hits?"

"You're mad we took the nail filing ability out of *magic missile*?"

"I'm mad that you're still calling it 'magic' when clearly it's not. It should be called *missile*."

"So we should find and eliminate the word 'magic' whenever referencing *magic missile*? That seems like an awful lot of work."

"If it's easier, put an asterisk next to it and write a footnote that states, 'this spell is no longer magical'."

"Great. I'll bring that up at the next errata meeting," he said. Then under his breath, he muttered something that sounded an awful lot like, *and then we'll make fun of you*.

"Here's a big one," I continued. "Say every morning I prepare three meals for the day. I have oatmeal, a veggie burger, and a can of black beans."

"Sounds disgusting."

"It's delicious. So I eat my oatmeal in the morning, and in the afternoon I get hungry again. Shouldn't I be able to eat my veggie burger? And then later, I should eat my beans."

"You seem to spend an awful lot of time converting your thoughts into analogies."

"What I mean is, if I know three daily spells, why can't I cast them all once a day?"

"Sounds like the real problem is that you're a bad eater."

"I'm a great eater. Tabitha is smart enough to know three daily spells. She should be able to use them."

"What level are you?" he asked.

"Four."

"Get smarter," he said. "You can cast two a day at level 5."

This was news to me, as every time I brought this issue up with New DM, he said something like, "Tough noogies."

"Why I didn't know this?"

"Because you're a bad eater."

Fortunately, I've stalked James Wyatt before, so I know he likes a pick-me-up around 11:00 A.M. And guess what? So do I!

Regardless of what Stephen may think, James is widely known as the nicest guy anywhere, and I'm pretty sure that includes R&D. That doesn't make me any less nervous about talking to him about my issues with Dungeon Masters. He's also allergic to wheat, so I can't sway him with brownies or bunt cake. We'd have to do this the old-fashioned way.

"Look, James, I love iPhones as much as the next person, but they have the potential to ruin a game. I'd like to incorporate a rule that anytime a player is caught texting, talking, surfing, or updating Facebook via iPhone, the DM has the option to drop a chandelier on their head as an interrupt action."

"Sure. How about if a player starts his or her turn on the Web, the DM can punish him?"

Check it out! I was already getting results for The People. "So we can expect this to appear in DMG 2?"

"Probably not," James said. "If the DM needs a rule like this, he or she should feel free to add it, but we won't make it official."

Not official? This goes against my rules-abiding sensibilities. Is James really saying DMs have the freedom to make up rules?

"How will they know they can add it as a rule if you don't make a rule that says adding it as a rule is now a rule?"

"The rules are meant to be guidelines," he said, taking a sip of hazelnut latte. "It's not against the law to tailor them."

Guidelines? Tailoring? All that work that went into writing the rules and James doesn't care if people follow them? This confirms what I've always suspected.

"New DM is lying to us," I said. "I also want to add a rule that allows players to call their DM's bluff."

"Not lying," James said. "Tailoring."

Now I know how Jack Bauer must feel when he finds out someone on the inside is really working with the terrorists.

James elaborated on his point. "*D&D* is supposed to be a shared experience between players and the DM. We can't possibly make all the rules fun for everyone all the time. So we give DMs the ability to customize their own campaigns so that each group can have fun. It's called 'Rule Zero'."

"Fun! Ha!"

"Aren't you having fun?" he asked.

"Of course," I said. "At least I am when New DM isn't using his classified, made-up R&D secrets as weapons of mass destruction."

"Then he must be doing something right."

I shook my fist in the air, presumably in the direction of DMs everywhere. Curses! I had failed The People! When James found out how careless people were with his hard-crafted rules, he was supposed to be my ally. Yet all this time, he was hoping that the rules are malleable enough to allow people to have fun? What kind of madness was this?

I was so exhausted and confused after my conversation with James that I accidentally returned to my old desk in Brand.

"She's back," Marty announced. "Scott, you owe me 10 dollars."

"Thanks for nothing," Scott said. "I thought you'd last until lunch at least."

I couldn't help being disappointed. I spent a lot of time coming up with my list of changes, but it looked as though R&D spends considerable amounts of time coming up with theirs.

"Imagine that," Scott said when I told him of my findings. "They're not just all good looks and charm."

"Yeah," Marty added, "they're down there trying to make the game *fun*. Meanwhile, you're trying to turn it into recess at a maximum security prison."

Maybe they were right. There's a combined 184 years of *D&D* experience just from the R&D team members I talked to. That's actual *game play*. It pains me to say this, but maybe The People don't need a lobbyist or liaison. Maybe R&D *is* The People. Perhaps my R&D skills were better suited to finding some healthy, wheat-free dessert options.

"Well, I'm glad you're back," Marty said. "It didn't smell the same without you here."

"Anyone feel like getting Thai food for lunch?" I asked. "I'm suddenly craving it."

About the Author

While she no longer works in R&D, Shelly Mazzanoble still enjoys making up rules and having R&D tell her why they won't work. She does not, however, smell like lemongrass chicken, and never has.

D&D Alumni

by Bart Carroll and Steve Winter

This month sees the release of *Player's Handbook 2*, which features the return of some favorite classes to the game, including the druid and the bard. In this month's *D&D Alumni*, we take a brief look back at these two classes—following their evolution through the editions and their subtle shared connections.

Most players anticipated the eventual return of these classes to the game, but why? How have the druid and bard retained their popularity? The answer, at least in part, can be the fantasy standard each class represents—priest of nature and traveling minstrel have been longstanding roles of the fantasy genre and retain a unique niche in the game. And while it might not seem likely at first, the druid and bard share more in the game than some might realize; for starters, their sense of fraternity, both in terms of organization and in certain stereotypes of modern college fraternities. Druids were initiates for most of their career, not becoming a named "druid" until 12th level, and thereafter they suffered the initiation of combat to advance. Bards, meanwhile, belonged to a college whose apparently snooty upperclassmen refused to associate with anyone of a lesser college.

Add to that the fact that bards had to play as druids for a time—or at least, as we shall see, continue their study under druidic tutelage.

The Druid

First let's take a look back at the druid through the various editions.

1st Edition: *Druids can be visualized as medieval cousins of what the ancient Celts sect of Druids would have become had it survived the Roman conquest.*

2nd Edition: *Central to their thinking was the belief that the earth was the mother and source of all life. They revered many natural things—the sun, moon, and certain trees—as deities. The druid is a priest of nature and guardian of the wilderness, be it forest, plains, or jungle.*

3rd Edition: *The fury of the storm, the gentle strength of the morning sun, the cunning of the fox, the power of the bear—all these and more are at the druid's command. The druid, however, claims no mastery over nature. That claim, she says, is the empty boast of a city dweller. The druid gains her power not by ruling nature, but by being one with it. To trespassers in a druid's sacred grove, and to those who feel her wrath, the distinction is overly fine.*

4th Edition: *Secretive and enigmatic, druids call the wilderness their home. They can run with a wolf pack, speak with the most ancient trees, and watch thunderstorms from atop the clouds themselves. They regard challenges as tests, both of their fitness and of their connection with the wild places of the world. And though many druids project an outward calm, they have the cunning of the beast and the fury of the storm.*

Druids began their inception as a subset of clerics (in 1st Edition), then later of priests (in 2nd Edition, alongside clerics). Worshipers and guardians of nature, the druids have always supported this role by the traits they possess, even these come at the cost of their overall utility to an adventuring party.

In 1st Edition, druids were required to be True Neutral in alignment (nature might be cruel or kind but apparently played no favorites). That led to con-

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siderable confusion, with many players and DMs assuming that druids wouldn't take an active hand in the affairs of the world. Their brand of neutrality, however, had to be seen in the context of the game's struggle between real forces of evil and good, law and chaos. In that war, druids held an active devotion to not *preferring* one side over the other, but that didn't mean they avoided *taking* sides. Their interest was in maintaining the balance. When events tipped in favor of good, for example, druids might temporarily take the side of evil. If chaos was gaining the upper hand, they would throw their strength behind law. Their aim in all situations was to prevent one side from becoming dominant and overthrowing the other. They used mistletoe for their holy symbol (which must have caused no end of confusion around the holidays), and could not wear or use metal armor or shields, since it spoiled their magical powers (whereas magic-users could not wear such armor since martial training was foreign to them). They could use some metal weapons, their set limited to the club, dagger, dart, hammer, scimitar, sling, spear, and staff. 2nd Edition added the sickle to what was still a rather odd, even arbitrary selection. In addition, druids boasted their own secret language (just as thieves had their cant, both of which could be learned by studious assassins) with which they "could discuss at length and in detail the state of the crops, weather, animal husbandry and foresting; but warfare, politics, adventuring, and like matter would be impossible to detail with the language."

These druids also could identify plants, animals, and fresh water; pass through undergrowth without leaving a trace; were immune to the magical charm of woodland creatures; and gained a new woodland language at each level, which was chosen from among centaur, dryad, elvish, faun, gnome, green dragon, hill giant, lizardman, manticore, nixie, pixie, sprite, and treantish—again, a fairly odd and arbitrary selection, but which allowed someone in the party to converse with these beings back when virtually every creature spoke its own language. Yet while these abilities connected with the druid's theme, they had limited use when the party left the woods and entered an actual dungeon.

Of course, the druid was also known for two other traits: the ability to change form three times each day into a reptile, bird, or mammal; and the limited number of upper-level druids, who could be supplanted only through magical or hand-to-hand combat. In 2nd Edition, this mysterious druidic organization was further detailed. The original limit of nine Druids (at 12th level) and three Archdruids (13th level) was expanded to apply only in a given geographical region, not the entire world. To gain one of these positions, a druid could wage combat until death, unconsciousness, or even to first blow. However, only one Grand Druid (take that, Highlander) could exist at a time, yet oddly enough, the current Grand Druid eschewed combat and simply selected his replacement—for a position cheerlessly described as "demanding, thankless, and generally unexciting for anyone except a politician." Thus, Grand Druids stepped down to take up adventuring once again, which is how they gained the greater abilities earlier presented in the 1st Edition *Unearthed Arcana*, including immunity to natural poisons, vigorous health and longevity, and the power to enter and survive within the Elemental Planes.

By 3rd Edition, druids were a separate class. They were no longer bound to a true neutral alignment or forced into combat to gain limited upper-level positions. Their bonus languages were collected into the more encompassing Sylvan, and their shapechanging (then called wild shape) could eventually include plant and even elemental forms. However, druids could still not wear metal armor, and their weapon proficiencies reflected their original set: club, dagger, dart, quarterstaff, scimitar, sickle, sling, and spear. Plus, they retained the debatably useful abilities of woodland stride and trackless step.

For 4th Edition, R&D's Mike Mearls took the lead on the druid's design. As he states, the *Player's Handbook 2* team "really wanted the druid to feel like shapechanging was a core part of the class. Druids are nifty because they are spellcasters on one hand, but they can also transform into vicious beasts and wade into melee. Striking the balance between those extremes, while also fitting the druid into the controller role, was a big challenge."

THE BARD

First let's take a look back at the druid through the various editions.

1st Edition: *Since this class subsumes the functions of two other classes, fighters and thieves, and taps them off with magical abilities, it is often not allowed by Dungeon Masters.*

2nd Edition: *The bard is an optional class that can be used if your DM allows. He makes his way in life by his charm, talent, and wit. A good bard should be glib of tongue, light of heart, and fleet of foot (when all else fails).*

3rd Edition: *Some say that music has a special magic, and the bard proves that saying true. Wandering across the land, gathering lore, telling stories, working magic with his music, and living on the gratitude of his audience—such is the life of a bard. When chance or opportunity draws them into a conflict, bards serve as diplomats, negotiators, messengers, scouts, and spies.*

4th Edition: *Bards are artists first and foremost, and they practice magic just as they practice song, drama, or poetry. They have a clear sense of how people perceive reality, so they master charm magic and some illusions. Sagas of great heroes are part of a bard's repertoire, and most bards follow the example of many fables and become skilled in a variety of fields. A bard's artistic ability, knowledge of lore, and arcane might are widely respected, particularly among the world's rulers.*

Some months back, we ventured into the appendices of the 1st Edition Player's Handbook to explore the Known Planes of Existence. Within these strange realms (the appendices, not the planes) could also be found one of the game's more unorthodox classes: the bard.

Like druids, bards have always held firm to their original class concept—that of a skald or performer with magical abilities tied to their music. Examples given have included Alan-a-Dale, Will Scarlet, Amergin, and Homer, while *Dragon 327*'s Class Acts expanded on these selections to mention further bards from history, including the most famous of all, William Shakespeare. The one character that was never explicitly stated but who might be the best model for a 1st Edition bard is Beowulf -- a roving hero of vast experience and might who splits his time between performing acts of epic prowess, battling ferocious beasts, and then bragging and singing his own praises to anyone who'll listen. Oddly enough (and in yet another connection with druids, albeit a tenuous one), 2nd Edition likened bards "only to certain groups of Celtic poets who sang the history of their tribes."

The 1st Edition bard, unlike other multi- or dual-classes, required a very specific and difficult course of study. They played as fighters for at least 5 and no more than 7 levels (or credits of study, in a way). Then they played as thieves, likewise for at least 5 and no more than 8 levels. Finally, they continued as druids, insofar as they were considered under druidic tutelage while playing as bards, and they gained access to druidic spells. Other bardic abilities better fleshed out their concept; as they rose in level, they gained new languages, increased in proficiency with Legend Lore and Item Knowledge, and—with their singing and playing—perfected their chance to charm opponents, negate harpies, and even soothe shriekers (though to do so, a 1st Edition bard "must always have a stringed instrument"—sorry, drummers).

In 2nd Edition, the bard's career path was revised to instead make the bard a subset of rogues (along with thieves). This both emphasized their roguish nature and compensated for the loss of the assassin as a thief subclass. They were still considered an optional class and described as jacks-of-all-trades. This bard continued to influence enemies, allies, and neutral parties alike through music but also possessed certain thief abilities and cast a small number of wizard (instead of druidic) spells. 2nd Edition bards were no longer bound to stringed instruments, however, but were considered "proficient singers, chanters or vocalists and can play a musical instrument of the player's choice (preferably one that is portable)." By 3rd Edition, bards were a core, not optional, class with their traits and abilities intact, including bardic music and knowledge, countersongs, suggestion, and inspiration.

As Mike states for the 4th Edition bard, the concept of a trickster loomed large. "It isn't that a bard is a jack-of-all-trades. It's more that he always has a trick up his sleeve. It was important to reflect that in his powers and in how you can build your bard."

As an example of the trickster, Mike can still recall his own 2nd Edition bard: "I remember scaling a wall to jump down upon an ogre when it entered a room. I played a warrior-minstrel, based loosely on the character Fflewddur Fflam from the *Chronicles of Prydain*. Like Fflewddur, he had a penchant for stretching the truth, though I can't remember if his shortsighted bravery (jumping on an ogre's back is a good way to start a fight but maybe not a good place to stay) was all me. I remember getting in trouble, a lot, and always trying to find ways to trick and scheme my way out of danger.

"I think that in 4E, the bard might still leap on the ogre's back, but as a leader he might convince the rest of the party that it's a good idea."

About the Author

Bart Carroll is loathsome beyond description and has no redeeming features. His body resembles that of a huge, bloated buffalo and gives off an offensive odor. The author's neck is long and thin, and perched atop it is a big head uglier than that of a warthog. His legs are thick and stumpy, much like a hippopotamus. The author's tail is strong and snakey, however, and moves with amazing swiftness to strike enemies.

Steve Winter is a writer, game designer, and web producer living in the Seattle area. He's been involved with publishing D&D® in one form or another since 1981. Tiny people and monsters made of plastic and lead are among his favorite obsessions.

Three Game Days for the "Twos"

BY CHRIS TULACH
illustrations by Eric L. Williams

This month, the first of three Worldwide D&D® Game Days launches to celebrate the release of *Player's Handbook® 2*. If you've been to the past Game Days, you're probably wondering what's changed and what you can expect this year. If you've never been to a Game Day before, it's a worldwide community event hosted at a gamer-friendly location near you (like a retail store, a gaming convention, or possibly a library) on the event date. Whether you're a 5-year veteran to the event or someone interested in giving it a try for the first time, read on!

Celebrating the "Twos"

On D&D's 30th anniversary year in 2004, we began Worldwide D&D Game Day as a celebration of the Dungeons & Dragons® game, designed to get folks out into the community and meet up with other D&D players to celebrate the game we all know and love. It was a great success, and we kept it going annually thereafter. At Game Day, players show up and participate in a ready-to-run adventure that comes with pre-generated characters—the players need only bring a desire to slay monsters and accomplish heroic deeds (and a set of dice, if they don't want to share). Last year, we decided to add a "launch party" element to Worldwide D&D Game Day, holding it on the weekend of the release of the 4th Edition core rulebooks. We had record numbers of people come out to give the new game a try (a first for many of them). A Game Day on a major rulebook's release weekend was a natural fit for the event, and organizers asked us to hold these events more often. This year, we deliver on that request, as we'll have Worldwide D&D Game Days

for each of the "Twos": *Player's Handbook 2*, *Monster Manual® 2*, and *Dungeon Master's Guide® 2*. As this article is released, the first of the three Game Days—for *Player's Handbook 2*—is in a matter of days.

PLAYER'S HANDBOOK 2 GAME DAY: MARCH 21

The first of the three Game Days arrives on release weekend for *Player's Handbook 2*. For this event, we're focusing specifically on the characters. We have four characters that use options from the new book (a gnome bard, a warforged warden, a tiefling invoker, and a drow avenger), and one character (a dragonborn paladin) that gives you an exclusive sneak peek at some new options from *Divine Power™* (due out this July). The characters also scrape the edges of paragon tier, embarking on an 11th-level, 3-hour adventure called *One Dark Night in Weeping Briar*. Not only is it a chance to try out a new character option, but if you haven't tried paragon-tier play, this is a great way to jump in with the short adventure! Also included as a bonus activity for this Game Day: A trivia sheet designed to test your knowledge of the 4th Edition products that have been released since the launch of the new game last summer.

MONSTER MANUAL 2 GAME DAY: MAY 23

Take a month to catch your breath, and then come on back to join us for the release of *Monster Manual 2* in May! While the format remains the same as the previous Game Day, this time the monsters are the stars, showing off some of the bad guys your D&D party can expect to face from *Monster Manual 2*. One iconic D&D monster makes his return to the game through the 5th-level adventure *Journey Through the Silver Caves*. Be one of the first to beat down some new baddies when you come to play in this event!

DUNGEON MASTER'S GUIDE 2 GAME DAY: SEPTEMBER 19

Spend your summer trying out the 4th Edition Eberron® campaign setting or hit up one of the big conventions (like Origins, Gen Con Indy, or PAX), and then get ready for the final Game Day in the trilogy. This time, we're trying something really different to celebrate *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*. We're going to let you contribute to the adventure! The Game Day kit for the *DMG 2* event contains material to let groups design their own encounters and swap DMs to play each other's adventures. This is the perfect opportunity to take a stab at designing your first encounter, as we provide a step-by-step guide for your group to use the resources provided to challenge other players at the event. We're really excited about this new format, and this summer, we'll have more details on how this event will be a Game Day to remember.

FINDING YOUR GAME

If you're looking to participate in any or all of this year's Worldwide D&D Game Day events, we've now made it even easier to find a location close by! Simply go to the D&D Home Page at www.wizards.com/dnd and you'll see a box called "Store & Event Locator" on the left-hand navigation bar. Enter your city, postal code, or country, and you'll be taken to the locator where you can view all the closest Game Day locations. Right now, the locator will display *Player's Handbook 2* event locations, but soon after the event is over, the *Monster Manual 2* locations will be available. Give it a try—you never know what new venue you might discover by using the locator!

Meet some new friends, kill monsters and take their stuff, and have fun at *Player's Handbook 2* Game Day!

NEW LIVING FORGOTTEN REALMS ADVENTURES RELEASING THIS MONTH

Check out the latest adventure offerings from the RPGA!

March 4, 2009

CORM1-3 Head Above Water

The Valwater family has fallen on hard times but believes that a secret near their family's decaying estates may redeem their good name. Can the PCs uncover the truth that will restore the family's honor? A Living Forgotten Realms adventure set in Cormyr for characters levels 7–10.

SPEC1-2 Zhent's Ancient Shadows (Convention Only until July 2, 2009)
Rumors of an ancient artifact, sacred to Shar, have proven all too true. The church of Amaunator has assembled an expedition to return to Zhentil Keep, enter the dangerous twilight-shrouded southern ruins, and destroy the artifact before it can return to its dark mistress. Will you join the followers of the Light on their quest to purge the Shadow? A two-round continuous-play Living Forgotten Realms Special adventure set in Zhentil Keep for characters levels 7–10.

March 11, 2009

LURU1-3 Shades of Blue Fire
A century ago, the Spellplague changed the very face of Faerûn. Now, whispered rumors emerging from the wilderness around Sundabar tell of a hitherto unknown and yet active plagueland surrounding the forsaken and long abandoned village of Dorn's Ford. A Living Forgotten Realms adventure set in Luruar for characters levels 7–10.

March 18, 2009

TYMA1-3 Tools of the Trade
You are asked to investigate "the theft" of caravan goods in the village of Ruinspoke. Aside from the monetary value of the stolen items, the reputation and prestige of House Jalt are at stake. Sometimes an accident is just an accident, and sometimes it's a clue to something far more sinister. Adventuring isn't the only dangerous profession. A Living Forgotten Realms adventure set in Tymanther for characters levels 7–10.

March 25, 2009

BALD1-3 Tome of the Traitor
When a Scribe of Candlekeep betrays his brethren to pursue his own goals, terrible knowledge escapes the walls of the Edificant Library. Who will take the responsibility of wielding this power? A Living Forgotten Realms adventure set in Baldur's Gate for characters levels 7–10.

CORE1-8 Taken
The Night Knives have been punished for the kidnapping of many children in the city of Saerloon and with it the authorities say the crime has been solved and the abductions stopped. But is it ever that simple? What if some say that there are still children missing that need rescuing from a dark fate indeed? A Living Forgotten Realms adventure set in Sembia for characters levels 7–10. Sequel to *CORE1-5 Touched by Darkness*.

See you next month!

About the Author

Originally thought to have been raised from a humble Midwestern family, **Chris Tulach** actually fell to Earth in a meteorite-shaped capsule flung from a planet far outside our galaxy. While under the yellow rays of Sol, Chris's nerdity far surpasses that of any normal human. Using this precious gift only for good, he has become the **RPGA** Content Designer, responsible for the development and deployment of **Dungeons & Dragons** organized play programs.

AMPERSAND

by Bill Slavicsek

In addition to the usual tidbits and secrets from the halls of R&D to our loyal D&D Insiders, I'm going to show off a couple of monsters from Monster Manual 2 and their new miniature counterparts, as well as give you a sneak peek at the upcoming Player's Handbook Heroes minis and power cards and Adventurer's Vault 2. But first, let me wander through R&D and see what's going on ...

R&D UPDATES

Let's start in my office, since it's closest to where I'm sitting. I just signed off on the first galleys for *Monster Manual 2*. It's full of cool monsters for every level of the game, and I can't wait to see some of these creatures in play. (Well, OK, I've already used a bunch of these in my games, but I can't wait for you to try them out.) I'm also in the midst of finishing up *Revenge of the Giants*, a wickedly nasty Paragon-tier super adventure coming out this summer. And then, there're these proposed release schedules for 2010, 2011, and 2012. Oh wait, I can't talk about any of those projects yet. But soon, soon.

Now I'm wandering through the Designers' area. Mike Mearls is cackling with glee as he gets ready to turn over *Player's Handbook 3* to Development. James Wyatt and Rich Baker are getting ready to launch into next year's campaign setting, which I know is going to surprise and delight many of you out there. I'll start dropping hints about the setting over the next few columns, and we'll see how many of you can figure out what's coming. Hmm. Nobody else is in yet. Oh well. We'll catch up with the rest of Design next time.

The Development pit is bustling as they get ready to pass a couple of projects on to Editing. The books coming out of the pit this week include *Primal Power* (our October release) and a new location-based product for early 2010. They're clearing the decks to receive *Player's Handbook 3* so they can begin to put it through its paces.

Editing is also a busy place, as is always the case. A couple of projects currently getting the red-pen treatment include *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, *Eberron Player's Guide*, and *Adventurer's Vault 2*.

James Wyatt and Rich Baker are getting ready to launch into next year's campaign setting, which I know is going to surprise and delight many of you out there.

We also got our copies of *Dungeon Delve* last week, and everyone in the department has been goobing out over the contents. Mike Mearls came into my office, copy in hand, to find out if I understood what we had given to the public. "There's more than 120 hours of play in this book," Mike said. "That's amazing! And it covers every level! We should let people know how much play they can get out of this thing." Thanks, Mike. You just did.

D&D GAME DAY

D&D Game Day is coming later this month. It's a celebration of *D&D*, focusing on the release of *Player's Handbook 2* and the primal power source. Find a location near you that's participating, and go get in a game. It's going to be a great event. Check here for more information.

Foe to Foe
Each foe that you slay fills you with the rush of battle, and as the battle rages, you cut your way from one foe to the next.
Primal, Weapon
Standard
ACTION
TARGET
Strength modifier at 21st
BARBARIAN
ATTACK
AT-WILL POWER

PLAYER'S HANDBOOK HEROES

The Series 1 set of *Player's Handbook Heroes* debuts later this month. Each of the six packs in the series features three visible, highly decorated miniatures suitable for use as player characters or NPCs. Each pack is devoted to characters of a particular power source, and each pack includes three new power cards associated with the classes that use the power source. For example, the goliath barbarian shown below (a new race and class from *Player's Handbook 2*) comes with a new at-will power. I'm reproducing the new power card here so you can get a sense of what you get with each pack.

MONSTER MANUAL 2

More monsters! Who doesn't love that? Even players get excited when their characters are challenged by monsters they've never faced before. In May, *Monster Manual 2* hits the shelves, along with the *Monster Manual: Dangerous Delves* miniatures set. With this sneak peek, I'm going to kill two kobolds with one magic missile by showing off the mini and the stats that are available in both products. See how this stuff works together?

MM2 sees the return of two classic D&D monsters: the frost giant and the rust monster! The frost giant and its kin also feature prominently in this summer's *Revenge of the Giants* super adventure, so stock up on these guys. And who doesn't want to throw a handful of rust monsters at a party of adventurers? I know that I do. In fact, I may just run that encounter at my next game session. (Hey Adran, my rust monster's eyeing your magic weapon! You might want to carry a backup into the next adventure.)

ADVENTURER'S VAULT 2

Just as with monsters, new equipment is something that every player character loves to find or buy. (In fact, we might be exploring this area more as the Voice of the Player delves into shopping as a skill and feat choice. Or not.) Here's a new set of items from the upcoming *Adventurer's Vault 2*, scheduled to be released in August.

AMMUNITION

The effectiveness of a ranged weapon depends on aim, but don't discount its payload.

Enchanted arrows, bolts, and sling bullets can be activated and fired from ranged weapons to achieve exceptional results. You must load magic ammunition before you can activate and fire it (spending whatever action is necessary to do so), and it's used up when fired. When used with powers that target multiple enemies, magic ammunition affects only the first attack roll or target after it's loaded. In certain circumstances (such as when loading is a free action), the ranged attacker can load more magic ammunition during a multi-target attack if desired.

Ammunition applies an enhancement bonus to an attack roll and damage roll when used. If the projectile weapon is magical, use the ammunition's enhancement bonus in place of the weapon's

enhancement bonus. The weapon's critical bonus and the properties from both the weapon and the ammunition still apply. Using magic ammunition doesn't prevent you from activating a magic weapon's powers.

You can fire magic ammunition without activating it, using your weapon's enhancement bonus and receiving no benefit from the ammunition's magic. The ammunition is still expended.

Ammunition names favor certain ammunition types, but unless the item description states otherwise, the ammunition can be an arrow, crossbow bolt, or sling bullet.

Arrow of Revelation — Level 9+

Ioun's eye marks this bright yellow arrow.

Lvl 9 +2 160 gp
Lvl 14 +3 800 gp
Lvl 19 +4 4,200 gp
Lvl 24 +5 21,000 gp
Lvl 29 +6 105,000 gp
Ammunition
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Property: When you hit an enemy using this ammunition, that enemy doesn't benefit from invisibility until the end of your next turn.

Dual Arrow — Level 10+

This forked arrow divides and then conquers.

Lvl 10 +2 200 gp
Lvl 15 +3 1,000 gp
Lvl 20 +4 5,000 gp
Lvl 25 +5 25,000 gp
Lvl 30 +6 125,000 gp
Ammunition
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Property: When you attack an enemy using this ammunition, you can roll twice and use either result.

Firestorm Arrow — Level 3+

The charred wood of this arrow seems to shimmer with heat.

Lvl 3 +1 30 gp
Lvl 8 +2 125 gp
Lvl 13 +3 650 gp
Lvl 18 +4 3,400 gp
Lvl 23 +5 17,000 gp
Lvl 28 +6 85,000 gp
Ammunition
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Property: When you hit an enemy using this ammunition, that enemy and each creature adjacent to it take 1d6 extra fire damage per plus.

Spider Bolt — Level 3+

This web-strewn quarrel envelops the enemy when it hits.

Lvl 3 +1 30 gp
Lvl 8 +2 125 gp
Lvl 13 +3 650 gp
Lvl 18 +4 3,400 gp
Lvl 23 +5 17,000 gp
Lvl 28 +6 85,000 gp
Ammunition
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Property: When you hit an enemy using this ammunition, that enemy and each creature adjacent to it is slowed until the end of your next turn.

In Case You Don't Know Him

Bill Slavicsek's gaming life was forever changed when he discovered **Dungeons & Dragons** in 1976. He became a gaming professional in 1986 when he was hired by West End Games as an editor. He quickly added developer, designer, and creative manager to his resume, and his work helped shape the *Paranoia*, *Ghostbusters*, *Star Wars*, and *Torg* roleplaying games. He even found some time during that period to do freelance work for **D&D** 1st Edition. In 1993, Bill joined the staff of TSR, Inc. as a designer/editor. He worked on a bunch of 2nd Edition material, including products for **Core D&D**, *Dark Sun*, *Ravenloft*, and *Planescape*. In 1997, he was part of the TSR crowd that moved to Seattle to join Wizards of the Coast, and in that year he was promoted to R&D Director for **D&D**. In that position, Bill oversaw the creation of both the 3rd Edition and 4th Edition of the **D&D Roleplaying Game**. He was one of the driving forces behind the **D&D Insider** project, and he continues to oversee and lead the creative strategy and effort for **Dungeons & Dragons**.

Bill's enormous list of credits includes *Alternity*, *d20 Modern*, *d20 Star Wars*, *Pokemon Jr.*, *Eberron Campaign Setting*, the *D&D For Dummies* books, and his monthly *Ampersand (&)* column for *Dragon* Magazine.